A
COURSE
OF THE
BELLES LETTRES.
VOL. II.

BRITISH MUSEUM

A COURSE OF THE BELLES LETTRES: OR THE PRINCIPLES OF LITERATURE.

Tranſlated from the FRENCH of the

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ERRATA in this Volume.

Page 5, *l.* 12, *dele* on this head.
11, *l.* 1, *for* greateſt, *read* greater.
40, *l.* 28, *dele* thro' whom they moved.
68, *l.* 12, *for* compoſition, *read* compoſing.
76, *l.* 2, *for* the one, *read* theſe.
122, *l.* 15, *for* Egid, *read* Ægis.
188, *l.* 23, *for* he thinks, *read* bethinks.
218, *l.* 28, *for* individually, *read* individuals.
253, *l.* 13, *for* act, *read* art.
310, *l.* 22, *for* Horace, *read* Horatii.
318, *l.* 9, *for* Horace, *read* Horatius.
319, *l.* 9, *for* Horace, *read* Horatius.
320, *l.* 22, *for* acknowledgment, *read* acknowledging.
340, *l.* 5, *for* imutabile, *read* mutabile.
343, *l.* 19, *for* untainted, *read* untented.

THE PRINCIPLES OF LITERATURE.

PART II.

Preliminary Advertisement.

IT is generally thought that a very ſmall ſhare of trouble and application is ſufficient to attain a perfect knowledge of the Belles Lettres: works of literature, it is ſaid, preſent themſelves with ſo eaſy, ſo agreeable an air! They offer us their beauties with ſo good a grace! In ſhort, it ſeems as if little more were neceſſary than to give ourſelves up without reſerve to the pleaſing impreſſion that ariſes from reading a copy of

fine verſes, or an elegant, well-written piece of proſe. But it is one thing to perceive beauties, and another to know the ſource and principle of them. The one is called enjoying them, the other underſtanding them.

But what imports it, you will ſay, whether we can exactly account for the cauſes or ſprings which produce an agreeable ſenſation in us, provided we enjoy the pleaſure of the impreſſion? The main point is to gain the propoſed end, which is done as ſoon as we perceive the ſenſation.

This manner of reaſoning might indeed hold good, if it regarded any other pleaſures than thoſe of the mind. But as it is certain that in theſe, the greater the knowledge is, the more lively will be the ſentiments, then certainly the ſtudy of the art ſhould precede the reading its productions.

A connoiſſeur who is well acquainted with the pains and application required in works of art, will be ſtruck with a picture of Raphael's, a compoſition of Lilly's, and a deſcription in Virgil, very differently from one who has nothing to form his judgment by, but his own taſte, and a good natural, but unpoliſhed underſtanding, if I may be allowed the expreſſion, and wholly void of all other lights or principles. How many delicate paſſages will be loſt upon ſuch an one! how many happy ſtrokes will eſcape him! what a number of the nicer beaties will paſs him

him unperceived! We often find that in the arts themſelves, many beauties that ſtrike the connoiſſeur in the moſt forcible manner make no impreſſion upon perſons of mere good natural ſenſe; or ſometimes occaſion even diſagreeable ones. A plain tune pleaſes an ear abſolutely ignorant of muſic: But if we were to add a treble and baſs it would become a confuſed noiſe, which would fatigue, inſtead of pleaſing him. Now, a few leſſons on the harmony of ſounds would clear up his perception by little and little; and if he could be taught to frame ſome notion of the method of conciliating ſuch ſounds as appear contrary to each other, he would by degrees become reconciled to harmony and concord. It is therefore neceſſary to have a knowledge of the arts before we can perceive all their beauties. But to attain ſuch knowledge we muſt firſt have ſtudied their nature and rules, and be able clearly to diſcern and comprehend their firſt principles; and this requires a much greater application than is commonly imagined.

In the ſciences and mechanic arts we have a diſtinct and palpable object, which we behold without us; and which we can at pleaſure manage, turn, and view in every part, and under all its different appearances. But here every thing is within us, and as the eyes can never ſee themſelves, in like manner the mind is never ſo much embaraſſed as when it would trace and

purſue the labyrinth of its own operations and movements.—It is by all allowed, that what regards the thought requires the moſt metaphyſical diſcuſſion: but what regards the ſentiment and taſte is ſtill infinitely more nice and ſubtle. What attention is required to know the different ways by which various impreſſions are conveyed to us! to conceive the manner in which certain motions, of a certain degree and kind, are produced! to diſcern what objects are the moſt proper to preſent to the mind, and the proper form and diſpoſition in which they ſhould be preſented! in a word, to remark the play of thoſe organs which convey the impreſſion, and which, to uſe Cicero's expreſſion, are ſo faſtidious! theſe are matters extremely delicate, and yet, without the knowlege of them, we enjoy the arts but by halves, and reliſh with diffidence the gifts they offer us. It will be neceſſary then, once for all, to have perfectly ſtudied theſe ſeveral queſtions, and to have made ourſelves acquainted with the principles ariſing from them: theſe being once made our own, the taſte will proceed with greater ſurety and confidence, will go greater lengths, and be capable of deciding without apprehenſion of being miſtaken.

The kinds we treat of in this volume do more particularly ſtand in need of theſe diſcuſſions. They contain the moſt abſtruſe points of literature

ture and the art of poetry; or, I may rather ſay, they contain the intire art of poetry, as this is all included in the epic and drama.

Our principal deſign is to diſtinguiſh the nature and difference of theſe two ſpecies of poetry, and to eſtabliſh ſuch ſure and clear ideas of them, as may enable young people to diſcern whether a work is intirely in its own proper kind, or how far it deviates therefrom.

We ſhall now make ſome few reflections upon this head, to ſerve by way of preliminary to what we are about to ſay on this head, and to put our readers upon their guard with reſpect to the combinations and variations of kinds which they will meet with in moſt works of taſte.

It is not with works of art as with thoſe of nature. This, conſtant and invariable in its productions, always brings back the ſame properties in the ſame kind. The Creator has formed his plan in a fixed unalterable manner, and the means he has prepared never fail to bring about the end for which they were deſigned; this is the effect of his infinite wiſdom and omnipotence. The artiſt on the contrary, who propoſes to himſelf the imitation of nature, with which he is but indifferently acquainted, finds himſelf at firſt puzzled in his choice of objects, and the proper manner of blending them in his compoſition: he is even at a loſs for a clear idea of the thing he is about to execute,

becauſe his views are limited and confined. In the next place, if after many efforts he happily comprehends this idea, this plan he is to execute; he then finds the choice of the means and method of employing them, become a ſource of freſh labor to him, a taſk ſtill more difficult and arduous than the firſt; he perceives the matter flatten and grow poor in his hands for want of proper light and force: the ſubject takes a different figure to that he would give it, becauſe the means prove refractory to the impulſe: they reſiſt him, they grow into difficulties, and at length turn quite from the purpoſe. Now a ray of light breaks through the obſcurity, the artiſt follows it; the next moment he finds himſelf out of his depth and falls into an abyſs. He lays a foundation indeed, becauſe he ſaw in groſs the materials with which he was to raiſe the edifice; but when he begins to make a nice calculation, he diſcovers his error and perceives the impracticability of the enterpriſe.

It is impoſſible that productions which occaſioned ſo much pains and labour, both in the conception and execution, ſhould be poſſeſſed of that character of uniformity and regularity which is found in nature, and which is the diſtinguiſhing mark of that power and intelligence which ſports while it performs miracles. It was neceſſary that man, when he would undertake the functions of a Creator in his way, ſhould, in ſome

ſome meaſure, conform to the matter itſelf on which he would operate, as being unable to reduce it to his purpoſes, or ſubject it to the end he has in view. When the Deity works, he calls upon matter, and it obeys his voice, and ranges itſelf according to his plan; but with the artiſt it is the reverſe; his matter which is wholly independent of his views and ideas, rather conducts than follows him, or if it does follow him, it is with regret, and with a bad grace. Therefore every ſubject muſt, on this account, have a form and nature peculiar to itſelf, and make every work a ſpecies apart. This is the caſe of moſt poems, whether epic, tragic, or comic, which are all ſo different one from another, and are compoſed of elements ſo diſſimilar, and theſe elements again are ſo blended and confounded with each other, that ſometimes there is nothing left in common to the particular ſpecies but the name, the times, the place, the character, or the religion: in a word, the genius of the author, the turn of his imagination, his natural paſſions, the configuration of the ſubject, the point whence it is taken; all theſe have ſuch an aſcendancy over the nature of the kind, that it has nothing but the title left to diſtinguiſh it by. The rules themſelves, which are a ſet of metaphyſical models, or originals of the beſt maſters, furniſh nothing but a vague and indeterminate plan. What artiſt could

ever yet reduce his ſubject exactly to theſe? They muſt all give way at every turn, and take the very form of the matter they ſhould direct and govern; whence it reſults that the ſeveral kinds in thoſe arts that imitate, muſt neceſſarily become weakened, loſe their worth, and at length degenerate into baſtard ſpecies.

But all the imitating arts are not alike ſubject to this inconvenience. Painting, for example, having a fixed determinate object, which is viſible nature; and a preciſe method of expreſſing this, by ſtrokes and colours; has been able to maintain itſelf in its own ſphere, and thereby proved itſelf almoſt as unalterable as nature. But in poetry and muſic, where the artiſt purſues an idea that flies from him, or a ſound that he has but a diſtant hint of; he often either knows not what he is in ſearch of, or what he has got; or elſe he is in ſuch a whirl of thoughts, ſuch a croud of different emotions continually ſucceeding, and as rapidly deſtroying each other, that it is next to a miracle that art alone is capable of furniſhing a chain of thoughts proper to form a natural, regular whole.

But as the arts are imitators of nature, and one of the chief perfections of nature conſiſts in the uniformity of every ſpecies; it is eſſential that the arts ſhould imitate her in that reſpect. With them, as in nature, every thing ſhould be what it ought to be, and that in an evident man-

manner diſtinguiſhed by an eſſential difference, ſuch as may immediately ſtrike the mind; otherwiſe there is ſome diſorder, ſome fault, miſtake, or want of ſtrength in the genius: in a word, there is that defect remarked by Horace, *vanæ fingentur ſpecies*, a ſet of vague ideas without any determinate end of their own, or any thing to ſeparate them from other objects.

What is it that eſſentially characteriſes each kind of poetry? Is it not either the quality of the actors or the nature of the ſubject? or, laſtly, the effect produced by the performance? The actors are made for the ſubject, the ſubject is choſen for the ſake of the effect it is intended to produce; ſo that the effect claims all to itſelf. It is this that is the center, object and end of the piece, it is this then alone that muſt eſſentially characteriſe each kind. All the reſt of the arts are characteriſed in the ſame manner.

Rhetoric is the art of ſpeaking eloquently, becauſe eloquent ſpeaking is the effect it is to produce. Grammar is the art of ſpeaking juſtly, as logic is of thinking juſtly; becauſe juſt ſpeaking and juſt thinking are the two effects to be brought about by thoſe two arts. In like manner will the effect ariſing from poetry ſerve to characteriſe its general eſſence: it is the art of painting ſo as to touch the heart. Diſtinguiſh next the different kinds of paſſions to be raiſed, and you will have the different ſpecies of

poetry. Paſtoral produces a pleaſing and gentle ſenſation: The epic raiſes our wonder and admiration: Tragedy melts us into tears: Comedy makes us laugh: but was comedy to draw tears from us, and tragedy ſet us a laughing: neither would any longer retain their proper character: or was the effect ariſing from them to be even equivocal and undeterminate, it would be a monſtrous production reducible to no proper kind, and conſequently would certainly diſguſt the ſpectator, who would be at a loſs to know whether he was invited thither to laugh or to cry.

It is the ſame with all the other kinds of production. Every reader expects to receive an impreſſion of ſome kind or other from them, and if he does not meet with it, or at moſt but imperfectly, and in a confuſed equivocal manner, he has juſt reaſon to be diſpleaſed.

We have endeavoured to diſtinguiſh the characters of fable and paſtoral in the two preceding articles; in the following one we ſhall attempt to do the ſame with regard to the epic, and ſo proceed with the other kinds. We beg leave to remind the young reader in this place, that it is not ſufficient to read faſt, merely for amuſement, but he ſhould ſtudy and reflect: and endeavour to give an account to himſelf of ſuch ideas as he may from time to time gather in the courſe of his reading.

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ARTICLE III.

Of the EPIC.

CHAP. I.

What an epic poem is.

THE greateſt number of young people who read the Æneid or Iliad, retain, at beſt, but very confuſed and imperfect ideas of thoſe two noble productions of antiquity. They recollect in general, perhaps, that they have met with deſcriptions in lofty verſe, of battles, tempeſts, and exploits, where Gods and men were mixed together; or if by chance they may have perceived ſomewhat of the poet's deſign, yet, as enemies to any thing that requires a cloſe andpainful application, they chuſe rather to indulge their imaginations in the pleaſure produced by wonderful relations, than be at the trouble of making themſelves maſters of the beauties ariſing from the ſymmetry and regularity obſerved in the work. Beſides having heard talk about allegory, moral, concealed inſtruction, *&c.* the apprehenſion of entering into ſo dry a labor as that of attempting to pierce through this veil of miſtery, determines them to paſs ſlightly over the ſurface; pleaſed rather to know the art but by halves, than to pay ſo very dear for the thorough knowlege of it.

The word Epic, taken in its greateſt extent,

is applicable to every poetical work; and conſequently to the leaſt fable in Æſop; ἔπος, ſignifies recital, and ποιεῖν, to make, feign, or create.

But according to the common ſignification eſtabliſhed by cuſtom, it is only given to the recital of ſome great action in which whole nations are intereſted, and often all mankind. Homer and Virgil have fixed the idea of it, till ſuch time as more accompliſhed models ſhall appear.

To judge from the firſt idea which preſents itſelf, the epic is an hiſtory, or ſomewhat that bears a ſtrong reſemblance to it; actions and events are what are therein recounted; but this reſemblance is wholly ſpecious, we muſt not be deceived by it.

Hiſtory is in a particular manner conſecrated to truth. It is a witneſs who gives its depoſitions, repreſenting facts ſuch as they really are without diſguiſe or embelliſhment. The epic, on the contrary, exiſts but by fiction; whatever it relates is the fruit of its own invention, and it acknowleges no other bounds than thoſe of poſſibility.

When hiſtory has given its teſtimony we have done with it, we require no more. On the contrary it is expected that the epic ſhould charm its readers, and excite their admiration; that it ſhould at once engage all the powers of the mind, reaſon, and imagination; that it ſhould touch our hearts, aſtoniſh our ſenſes, and cauſe in the

ſoul

ſoul a ſucceſſion of pleaſing ſituations; meeting with ſuch interruptions only as are requiſite to render its enjoyment more great and exquiſite.

Hiſtory preſents us with ſimple facts, without endeavouring to pleaſe by the ſingularity of cauſes or means. It is the picture of men and times.—conſequently the image of inconſtancy, caprice, and of a thouſand changes which ſeem the mere work of chance and fortune. The epic relates one action only and not many. This action is intereſting in its nature; the parts are regularly adjuſted, the cauſes probable, the characters diſtinguiſhed, the manners ſuſtained; in ſhort, it is intire, proportioned, well arranged, and perfectly connected in all its parts.

Laſtly, hiſtory only ſhews us natural cauſes ſhe walks before us with her memorials and dates in her hand; or, if led by philoſophy, ſhe ſometimes penetrates into the human heart, to look for the hidden principles of thoſe events which common fame attributes to different cauſes: ſhe never exceeds the limits of human ſtrength and prudence. The epic is the relation of a muſe, that is, of a celeſtial ſpirit, who not only ſees the working of natural cauſes, butlikewiſe the action of thoſe ſupernatural ones which prepare the ſprings of the human mind, and give them that impulſe and direction which is neceſſary to produce the action that is the ſubject of the poem.

Here

Here then, we have in the ſame view, on one ſide hiſtory, that furniſhes us with a relation of actions, and explains to us their natural cauſes, and on the other the epic, in which we have alſo a relation, but of a ſingle action only and no more; in which, beſides the natural cauſes, we have alſo a view of the ſupernatural ones which influenced theſe.

We ſhall then define hiſtory, a relation of actions; and in contradiſtinction, we ſhall call the epic a Poetic relation of a marvellous action.

As the term Poetic includes whatever regards the imitation of nature, theſe few words give us the difference of the epic from romance, which goes beyond probability; from hiſtory, which goes not ſo far as the Wonderful; from the drama, which is not a narrative; and from the other little poems, whoſe ſubjects have nothing in them of noble or heroic.

All we have to ſay on this kind of poetry, will conſiſt in developping this definition, and authenticating it by the conduct of thoſe poets who have merited the ſuffrage and applauſe of all ages.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Of the epic ſubject.

THE epic ſubject is neither a habit nor a paſſion, it is an action.

A habit has nothing ſenſible in itſelf, it is only an aptitude of acting well or ill, according as it is either virtuous or vicious; but this aptitude can only diſcover itſelf by action. An artiſan aſleep has within himſelf the habit and ſcience of his art. It is evident therefore that a habit cannot be the ſubject of a relation.

It is the ſame with reſpect to the paſſions; every paſſion is an emotion more or leſs lively, of the heart, carrying us into action; it is a cauſe ready prepared to produce an action.

But what is an action? This has been already defined *: it is an enterpriſe formed through choice and deſign. The connection and difference of theſe three will be clearer underſtood by an example.

Young Horatius is fired with love for the glory of Rome †; this is an habit in him: his ſiſter laments his victory which makes the glory of Rome, upon which he falls into a rage; this is an emotion of paſſion in him. He kills her in the height of his fury; here is the action. The

* See vol. i. † See the Horatii, a tragedy of Corneille's; and the Roman Father by Mr. Whitehead.

habit

habit is the diſtant principle; the object which ſtrikes the ſoul, animates this principle; the principle thus animated is put into action, with a greater or leſs degree of vivacity, according as the ſoul has been more or leſs ſenſibly affected.

CHAP. III.

The qualifications of the EPIC ACTION.

It ſhould be ſingle.

THE action in every poem ſhould be ſingle. If two actions were to proceed on at once, both of them equally intereſting, they would divide the heart, and make its emotions uncertain; if they were not equally intereſting, then one would give us a diſtaſte to the other; ſo that the ſuffrages are all on the ſide of unity.

Then all the actions of a hero taken together, or what is called the life of the hero, cannot be the matter of a regular poem for the following reaſons,

1. An intire life is an object too diffuſed to be taken in at one view. It will be impoſſible to make one's ſelf maſter of all the little relations and proportions between its parts, conſequently one cannot ſee all its beauty. Thoſe painters who have given us ſeveral different actions of the ſame hero in one piece, have only encloſed ſo many different pieces in one frame.

2. Every

2. Every part of an hero's life is not equally heroic, and his efforts to atchieve wonders may be interrupted by a repoſe of ſeveral years.

3. Laſtly, as the facts are not neceſſarily dependent on each other, nor tending to one common end, including them all as means, the reader has nothing intereſting to carry him on to the end of the poem.

Theſe three reaſons are more than ſufficient to induce every poet to confine himſelf to one ſingle action; but a fourth might yet be added: *viz.* the impatience of the reader; who never likes to ſee ſuch a diſtance between the beginning and end of what he has begun, but will imagine himſelf in a wood from whence he is never likely to get out: this idea tires him before-hand; he grows impatient and loſes half the pleaſure he would otherwiſe taſte.

What makes the action of a poem ſingle?

The anſwer to this queſtion is very ſimple. The action is ſingle when it is independant of every other action; and that all its parts are connected in a natural manner with each other.

But what brings about this connnexion of parts, and diſtinction of the whole, by which the action is rendered independent of whatever does not directly belong to it?

Some authors will ſay, that it is the unity of the moral maxim, ſuppoſed to reſult from the poem; that it is this maxim that collects and draws

draws the ſeveral parts to itſelf. But it is very eaſy to conceive an action ſingle, without ſuppoſing it at the ſame time to teach any particular truth. Achilles kills Hector, this is an action: will there be any occaſion to reflect upon the moral to find this action to be ſingle? Beſides, what moral can be drawn from this action thus ſimply repreſented; but which is nevertheleſs a real action?

Others again have imagined that the unity of the action depended upon the unity of the undertaking; but every epic poem is a tiſſue of a number of different enterpriſes. Every canto contains ſeveral; what is it then that unites them all in one point of view?

Is it the unity of the hero? The Iliad takes in a whole people.

Is it the ſuperior excellence of any one particular hero? If Achilles excels in valour, Agamemnon excels in authority, Neſtor in wiſdom, and Ulyſſes in prudence.

It is neither of theſe then that makes the action ſingle, or in other words, that makes it a whole; collected, full, and ſolid in itſelf, *teres atque rotundus*, and entirely detached or ſeparate from whatever is not itſelf.

The unity of the action ariſes from the very propoſition of the ſubject. It is this that diſcovers the deſign of the poet, and marks the beginning and ending of the work.

Every

Every action has two ends, the one determining the action of the perſon who acts; the other terminating the action itſelf. The one points out the place departed from, the other the place arrived at. Every ſtep the poet takes is neceſſarily in this direction; all the materials he employs, even the epiſodes themſelves, are carried in this current, or rather incloſed within theſe two terms as within a circle. Had Virgil ſaid, I ſing the deſpair of Dido; though in that caſe, his poem would have contained but one ſingle book, yet it would have been a complete work. Or if he had ſaid, I ſing the deſcent of Æneas into hell, the funeral obſequies of old Anchiſes, the fatal adventure of Niſus and Euryalus; the action of his poem would ſtill have been entire, though conſiſting at moſt of but five or ſix hundred verſes. But, ſaying as he did; I ſing a hero, who after a thouſand toils, ſettled at length in Italy; every obſtacle this hero had to ſurmount before he was thus eſtabliſhed in his kingdom, became part of the poet's ſubject.

There is no ſuch thing in the world as abſolute abſtracted matter; no one action which does not ſome way belong to the general maſs of human cauſes and actions. The moral world like the natural, is all one piece; whatever is taken from thence, can be only a part of the whole: to make a whole of this part and to terminate it completely, it muſt

be

be ſeparated from whatever has any relation to it, and its connections with any other thing muſt be wholly broken, which is done by the propoſition. The author ſays, I mean to ſing the wrath of Peleus's ſon; there begins the action. This wrath being ſung the poem is ended. Had Homer been inclined to ſing the taking of Troy, he might have done it without injury to the merit of unity. There would have been no greater number of events in ſuch a poem than there is in his Iliad: but as he did not chuſe to do it, it was doubtleſs, becauſe the taking of a city or town appeared to him leſs intereſting to human kind, than a paſſion, which was a part of humanity; or that this whole appeared too great to be comprehended at one view. This laſt reaſon, which we have from Ariſtotle, makes directly againſt Virgil; for, properly ſpeaking, the action of the Æneid is the conqueſt of Italy, and the eſtabliſhment of a people in a foreign land. The unity of the epic poem therefore depends on the propoſition which the poet makes at his firſt ſetting out; and this renders it eſſential to every poem.

But it may be ſaid, if the propoſition alone is ſufficient to make the unity of the ſubject, whoever ſhould begin with ſaying, I ſing the actions of the Roman people, his poem would have an unity of ſubject.

But

But here a proper diſtinction ſhould be made between ſubject and action. A ſubject may be ſingle, and contain a thouſand actions, as is evident from the very objection before us. We are now ſpeaking of action, and not ſubject; and allowing that the action in every poem is a ſubject, yet every ſubject that is ſingle, is not properly a ſubject for a poem if it wants unity of action.

It is neceſſary that this ſubject ſhould preſent one ſingle object in the beginning, and that all the machinery made uſe of by the poet ſhould tend to this point only; this will make the ſubject an action, and at the ſame time a ſingle action.

But the unity the principal action does not hinder the inſerting of epiſodes or particular incidents, provided the poet makes a decent uſe of this licence and introduces them dexterouſly.

Of epiſodes.

By epiſodes we generally underſtand certain leſſer actions ſubordinate to the main action, and which ſeem to play about it, as it were to refreſh the reader's mind after a cloſe attention, by a variety foreign to that of the ſubject itſelf; every reader loves to vary his objects now and then for a ſhort time at leaſt. Of this kind is the ſtory of Cacus told by Evander, that of Achemenides, and of Niſus and Euryalus. But were

theſe paſſages intirely omitted, the Æneid would be ſtill as much an epic poem as before.

The word epiſode originally ſignified thoſe little recitals or ſtories with which the ancients were wont to interſperſe the hymns and ſongs they compoſed in honour of their gods. Theſe ſtories at firſt related immediately to the divinity they celebrated; afterwards they became more general, and were taken from other ſubjects, ſuch as the relation of ſome heroic action; and were entirely diſtinct from each other, both in matter and ſubject. In proceſs of time they begun to join them in ſuch a manner, that from a connexion of the ſeveral parts they formed a continued and regular body of narration. They now came to take a greater pleaſure in theſe recitals than in ſinging the hymns themſelves; and by that means the recital which was at firſt merely epiſodic or adventitious, became now the main ſubject; and in like manner the hymns which had been at firſt the chief object, were now only epiſodic. Notwithſtanding this change in their diſpoſition they ſtill retained their original names, at leaſt in every repreſentation accompanied with ſongs: in theſe the recitals were always called Epiſodes on account of their original; and the hymns which were ſung had the name of Chorus given them. This has occaſioned the confuſion and perplexity we find in reading the writings of the ancients on this ſubject.

But

But the word epiſode having changed its ſignification only in the drama, it is, in every other ſpecies of poetry, to be taken in its priſtine ſenſe; and as in its original it ſignified a detached piece, it implies the ſame now in the epic: ſo that we ſhall by the term epiſode underſtand a part of the poem conducing to the principal action, but which may at any time be detached from it, without hindering it from attaining its end.

The epiſode in an epic poem ſhould always be brought on by the circumſtances. There are certain inviſible links which join together an infinite number of things. It remains to demonſtrate this, which we ſhall do as follows: Æneas goes to Evander to apply for his aſſiſtance; he finds him ſacrificing: It is natural that Evander ſhould inform him of the occaſion of that ſacrifice, and the more ſo as it is in commemoration of the action of a hero, of Hercules, who freed the country of a notorious robber that had troubled the public peace, and that, beſides all this, it is to a hero that he is ſpeaking.

The epiſode ſhould be ſhort and conciſe, in proportion as it is more or leſs removed from the main ſubject; ſuch is that we have juſt mentioned, being intended only as an accidental refreſhment for the mind, to give it new vigor, and not to take it off from the ſubject.

The objects it preſents us ſhould be quite different from any that preceded, or are to follow

low them, for this plain reaſon that they are employed merely for the ſake of variety. If an author, after having given a deſcription of a battle ſhould preſent us with an epiſode any way relating to war, he would abſolutely run counter to the very end and intention of epiſodes.

It ſhould however partake of the general ſtrain of the piece. Virgil does not paint the paſſion of Dido in the ſame manner as he does that of Gallus—and why? The one was a queen, the other a ſimple ſhepherd.

CHAP. IV.

Of the intireneſs of the epic action.

ONE of the qualifications of an epic action is to be intire: but this is included in the idea we have already given of the action, which neceſſarily ſuppoſes a beginning, middle, and end. For, who would think of preſenting us with a poem where the action was begun and not finiſhed? An author can never fall into an error of this kind but from an abſolute inability of finiſhing his ſubject.

CHAP. V.

The epic action ſhould be intereſting.

THERE are two ways of intereſting the reader; the one depends upon the nature of the action and its object, the other upon the nature

nature of the action and its object; the other upon the nature of the obſtacles to be ſurmounted. The firſt of theſe cauſes an emotion in us, this is called the affecting; the ſecond excites and raiſes our curioſity, and is therefore called the ſingular.

The affecting comprehends ſeveral ſorts of intereſts; as, 1. A national intereſt; thus a Roman intereſts himſelf in the undertaking of Æneas as being a Roman. 2. A religious intereſt; a Chriſtian intereſts himſelf in the undertaking of Godfrey of Bulloigne, to deliver the ſepulchre of Jeſus Chriſt from the hands of infidels. 3. Laſtly, there is a natural intereſt, or the intereſt of humanity; every man intereſts himſelf in the misfortunes of another man.

Theſe three kinds of intereſt ſhould be all united in the action of an epic poem, which ſuppoſes not only a work of taſte, but at the ſame time, a political, hiſtorical, theological, and moral work, as will be ſeen hereafter.

The Iliad and Odyſſey united them all with reſpect to the Greeks, as the Æneid did with reſpect to the Romans. In our times we find only the ſingle one of humanity in theſe poems, which is indeed the only one that laſts as long as mankind; and conſequently the only one that can, from its nature, inſure immortality to the piece wherein it prevails.

And in this reſpect Homer ſeems to have ſuc-

ceeded much better than Virgil; he has not, like him, confined his ſubject to the eſtabliſhment of a prince in a particular part of the world. It intereſts not us that Æneas landed upon the banks of the Tiber, and took a kingdom from another who had pretentions to it. The Greek poet takes his ſubject from the human heart; it is a paſſion which grows into a flame, breaks forth in an impetuous action, and is the cauſe of the greateſt evils and deſolation. His whole Iliad is taken up with the wrath of a hero; as the fourth book of the Æneid is with the love of a queen: ſo that we may with juſtice affirm, that the ſubject of the Iliad is as much ſuperior to that of the Æneid in the intereſting part, as the fourth book of the Æneid is to any of the others. I am much better pleaſed with the nature of friendſhip in Niſus and Euryalus, than with the combats of Turnus and Æneas. All men are not born warriors, or with an inclination to fight; but every one has a heart open to love, hatred, or ſenſibility; and the more he finds it exerciſed in theſe ſenſations the better is he pleaſed.

The Odyſſey is of the ſame kind. We find ourſelves affected with the misfortunes of Ulyſſes without conſidering whether he is a Greek or not, for he is a man, and a man who ſuffers all the misfortunes that human nature can ſuſtain from the wrath of gods, and all nature combined againſt him; all which he ſurmounts by his extra-

traordinary patience and prudence. Homer, who was ſenſible how much his poem depended upon intereſting his readers on the ſide of humanity, always takes care to preſent them with this in its ſtrongeſt lights, in every circumſtance, diſcourſe, and ſituation throughout his piece: from which conduct there occurs the following reflection; that if the poems of Homer and Virgil convey ſo much pleaſure to us, whom they can intereſt in only one light, inſtead of three, what impreſſion muſt they have made upon a people who ſaw their own hiſtory, manners, and religion characteriſed in them? And by the reverſe of the argument, how far ſhort muſt we fall of the ancients in our epic poems, which, though poſſeſſed of the three great powers of intereſting us, viz. on the ſide of country, religion, and humanity, yet ſcarcely raiſe an emotion in our heart while we read them, or at moſt one far inferior in every degree to that we perceive from a work of the ancients.

Humanity, or that intereſt which engages our concern for the affairs of others, is divided into ſeveral branches, each of which is the principal object of a particular kind of poetry; and firſt,

1. The Epic intereſts every one, by propoſing objects in themſelves heroic and wonderful: this is capable of elevating the ſoul by the conſideration of illuſtrious examples; thus it attracts us by admiration.

2. Tragedy affects us by the dreadfulneſs of its events, and the characters of thoſe who fall the victims of them; ſhe allures us to her by the ſentiment of compaſſion, and fixes us by that of terror.

3. Comedy amuſes us by the ſingularity and oddity of actions and manners; ſhe pleaſes us by making us laugh, as the epic did by ſurpriſing us, and tragedy by exciting our tears.

4. The Paſtoral charms us with its ſweetneſs and ſimplicity, and by the idea of tranquillity annexed to it.

But the Epic Muſe, as parent and ſource of all the reſt, ſhould neceſſarily include their ſeveral intereſts or ways of touching us. When it has raiſed the admiration of the reader by the wrath of Juno, who unchains the winds; and by the power of Neptune, who calms the ſea again; ſhe next moves him with all the horrors of a town delivered over to rapine and pillage, or ſoftens and melts him with the hapleſs paſſion of a princeſs, who at length falls a victim to her deſpair. Sometimes, but that ſeldom, ſhe paints a brawling Therſites, or a pilot thrown into the ſea through malice, who riſing above the waves, vomits torrents of ſalt water. In fine, when the poet ſees proper, he paints a landſcape, deſcribes the eaſe of a country life, the ruſtic ſports of the good Evander, and the glories of the riſing ſun, who awakens him with his refulgent beams to

the melody of a thouſand ſurrounding birds. To be a tragic, a comic, or a paſtoral poet, it is enough to be that, and that only; but whoſoever would be an epic poet, muſt be them all, and that in the moſt eminent degree. An epic poet is the painter of the whole univerſe.

Of the plot and unravelling.

There is a ſecond method of intereſting us, which ariſes from the obſtacles which ſtrongly oppoſe the hero in the completion of his deſigns. The former method is more moving, this again is more lively and quickening to the taſte.

Every reader who has a ſoul muſt take part in the enterpriſe that he ſees going on; he becomes attached to the hero of the piece; he joins with him in all his views; he is equally incenſed at the obſtacles that preſent themſelves; he ſeeks for means within himſelf of overcoming or avoiding them; which, if he cannot find, and is at laſt obliged to give all up to the hero, then he aſſiſts him in ſecret with his vows and wiſhes, and impatiently waits the iſſue till he ſees his hero vanquiſhed or triumphant, and triumphs or falls together with him. Such is the idea we may form of the intereſt ariſing from the danger or from the obſtacle that preſents itſelf. Were it only through curioſity, the mind is deſirous to ſee the end of a doubtful affair. A man, and a

great man, who is poſſeſſed of ſome ſecret reſources within himſelf, is now exerting his utmoſt efforts; we wait impatiently; and however inſenſible the heart may be, we are pleaſed with having waited for the event, if they ſucceed at laſt.

The obſtacles ariſing in the courſe of the action, form what we call the plot or intrigue. The manner in which theſe obſtacles are removed or ſurmounted, is called the unravelling.

An action void of intrigue is almoſt always incapable of affecting us; for the paſſions muſt be raiſed by difficulties, which give occaſion to the exertion of the nobler virtues. Hence every poetic action ſhould have an intrigue.

In an epic poem there is the main plot and the under plots; the main plot ſhould be ſingle, the others may be multiplied, according to neceſſity or probability.

The main plot of the Æneid is the wrath of Juno, who oppoſes the ſettling of Æneas in Italy. The under plots are the effects of this wrath, ſuch as a tempeſt which drives Æneas off the coaſt of Italy; the paſſion of a princeſs, who ſtrives to retain the hero in her own kingdom; or the courage of a prince, who oppoſes the eſtabliſhment of this hero on a throne he looks upon as his own right. Now, theſe three plots are ſubordinate to the principal one, which includes them all, ſo that they make rather three branches

of

of one plot, than three ſeparate plots of themſelves.

The plots ariſe from the ignorance of circumſtances or want of power in the perſon who is in action. † Iphigenia is on the point of ſacrificing her own brother Oreſtes, whom ſhe does not know: will ſhe ſacrifice him or not? This is the intrigue which occaſions all the uneaſineſs of the ſpectator. Did ſhe know it was her brother, ſhe would doubtleſs ſave him; ſo that it is her ignorance that keeps every mind in ſuſpence. The queen in ‡ Barbaroſſa hears the tyrant doom her ſon to death, that ſon ſo dear to her, and whom ſhe had long thought loſt, and who, in this very inſtant, makes himſelf known to her. But, weak as ſhe is, and deſtitute of all help, how is ſhe to oppoſe the tyrant's power? Selim, on the other hand, ſees himſelf ready to ſuffer an ignominious death, and by the orders of a wretch who has murdered his father, and uſurps the throne which is his right; but how can he extricate himſelf from this dilemma? This is the plot. A tyrant, and a tyrant in the full exerciſe of lawleſs power is to be diſarmed; and by whom? a weak helpleſs woman, and a young friendleſs boy.

† Iphigenia in Aulis.

‡ Barbaroſſa, a tragedy.

The plot which ariſes from want of knowledge is unravelled by the diſcovery of what was hitherto unknown. Iphigenia knows her brother again, and ſaves him. The other plot is unravelled by oppoſing force to force, or by the effort of ſuperior art. Selim had made himſelf known to Oſman; this nobleman ſecretly raiſes a party, breaks into the palace of Barbaroſſa, and delivers the prince, who kills the tyrant with his own hand.

The firſt manner of unravelling is called the unravelling by diſcovery, the ſecond by *peripetia* or revolution.

We muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe a revolution, or, which is the ſame thing, a change of fortune in the affairs of the perſon who undertakes the enterpriſe, whether he ſurmounts the obſtacle or ſinks under it. Selim ſurmounts it, Jonas does the ſame in the Athaliah of Racine; both become happy in the end. Phædra and Hippolitus in the ſame author, and Romeo and Juliet in Shakeſpear, ſink under it; this is ſtill a revolution, for they become more unhappy than before. Sometimes the *peripetia* is two-fold, as in Athaliah and Barbaroſſa, in both which the uſurper falls and the true prince mounts the throne. Sometimes there is added a diſcovery, as in Creuſa, where Dorilas, though a ſhepherd's ſon, is found to be the lawful heir of the crown; here ignorance of perſons being removed, their ſituation becomes thereupon changed.

No enterpriſe whatever is difficult, otherwiſe than by the means of the perſon who undertakes it; ſo that the intrigue, properly ſpeaking, is only the weakneſs of the means, when compared with the undertaking. An unravelling is never ſo agreeable and pleaſing, as when we ſee the weakeſt ſide prove victorious through ſome great effort of wit, courage, or addreſs; this appears with an eclat that has ſomething of the marvellous.

The plot may lie in the very action, either when the undertaking is attended with great difficulty in itſelf, as a deſcent into hell; or when ſome obſtacles preſent themſelves from without, as the oppoſition made by Turnus to the ſettling of Æneas in Italy. The more intricate the plot is, that is, the more difficult it is to unravel, the more perfect it will be.

The unravelling appears beſt when ariſing immediately from the action itſelf; as the victory of Horatius † over the three Curiatii; and not drawn from exterior circumſtances, as the impriſoning ‡ Tartuff by an order from court. 2. It ſhould be natural, that is to ſay, not appear artful or concerted, but ariſing immediately from the action itſelf. 3. It ſhould be brought

† See the Roman Father by Whitehead, taken from the Horatii of Corneille.

‡ Moliere's Tartuffe, Act 5.

about by ſome unforeſeen event, and not by a ſimple change of mind. Had Achilles returned to the fight merely at the requeſt of Agamemnon, he would have had no ſufficient reaſon for his action conſidering his character: nothing leſs was required to bring this about than the death of his dear loved friend Patroclus; and then the unravelling, which is his reconciliation with Agamemnon, ſo far from appearing forced, or drawn from other circumſtances comes about of itſelf, through the great intereſt Achilles has in this reconciliation.

Properly ſpeaking, the plot and the unravelling conſtitute the true character of each kind of poetry. The plot contains the efforts of the acting cauſe; the unravelling the effect which ſuch cauſe brings about, or fails in.

If admiration is to be raiſed, if the ſoul is to be ſurpriſed or elevated, the obſtacles preſented to the hero ſhould be ſuch as carry with them a proſpect of great difficulty in the ſurmounting, and appear to demand a ſtrength more than common; all which however he is to triumph over. So the unravelling of an epic poem ſhould neceſſarily be ſucceſsful and happy. Merit is offered for us to admire; now, if this merit ſinks beneath adverſity, it becomes rather the object of our pity than admiration. Thus Achilles, in the Iliad, triumphs over the envy of Agamemnon, and the valor of Hector. Ulyſſes, in the

Odyſſey,

Odyſſey, triumphs over his misfortunes and his enemies. Æneas conquers Turnus; and laſtly, Satan, in Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, triumphs over the firſt Man; for Satan is, beyond all doubt, the hero of that poem; for if it be Adam, the unravelling is tragical, and no ways epic; but if it is tragical, all the ſupernatural machinery employed in that poem are but ſo many uſeleſs wheels, for the marvellous has no ſort of relation to pity, nor is in the leaſt made to excite it. The devil then is certainly propoſed as the object of our admiration in Paradiſe Loſt; an object which may, no doubt, appear ſingular; but then we ſhould judge of it in the ſame manner as of a painter's idea, by the execution rather than the ſtory. Beſides, if it does not raiſe admiration, it at leaſt cauſes aſtoniſhment.

When pity or terror are to be raiſed, the unravelling or cataſtrophe ſhould certainly be unfortunate. Give what name you will to a tragedy which ends happily; let it be heroical, and full of the moſt affecting incidents; yet, unleſs we meet with the misfortunes of ſome favorite character to deplore, it is no longer, properly ſpeaking, tragedy. It is ſomewhat that borders upon tragedy, indeed: it is, if you will, the epic in a dramatic dreſs; or, a ſtory in plain life diſguiſed in the garb of tragedy.

I have mentioned the deploring the misfortunes of a favorite character. The puniſhment

inflicted on a tyrant does not operate upon us in a tragic manner. When Mithridates falls, I feel no pity for him, any more than for Barbaroſſa, Athalia, Haman, or the King in Hamlet. Nor do the ſituations of Pyrrhus, Joad, Caliſta, or Andromache, cauſe any terror in me. Their ſituations are, doubtleſs, very affecting: they may touch the heart, but they do not reach the mark. If we call theſe ſcenes tragical, it is, becauſe they are preſented to us as ſuch, and we are accuſtomed to annex ſome ſuch idea to them: and when pleaſure is in the caſe, we are not very nice about diſcovering what can procure it us with the greateſt propriety. — But where ſhall we find a cataſtrophe of a truly tragic kind? In Phædra and Hippolitus *, the Brothers †, Racine's Britannicus, Shakeſpear's Lear (as written by himſelf) the Horatii, Œdipus, and Polyeuctes of Corneille, and laſtly, Thompſon's Tancred and Sigiſmunda, will furniſh us with examples. Here the hero, who is the object of the ſpectator's concern, falls into the moſt dreadful and ſhocking calamity: we ſhare with him in all the ills of humanity; we are penetrated with grief at his ſorrows, and ſimpathiſe with himſelf.

* By Mr. Smith.
† By Dr. Young.

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Ariſtotle complains of the effeminacy of the Athenian ſpectators, who dreaded this tragic grief; to prevent which, the poets were obliged to extricate their favorite character from all his difficulties. ‡ We are not leſs timid on this ſcore than the Athenians were; we are ſo afraid of grief, that we even ſhudder at the ſhadow and image of it, if never ſo little magnified. This has ſo enervated and impoveriſhed the tragic ſpirit among us. We very clearly perceive the alteration, in comparing the impreſſion we feel from the Polyeuctes of Corneille, with that which is given us by the Athalia of Racine. They are both very affecting; but, in the one, the ſoul is plunged, ſteep'd in a delicious ſorrow; in the other, after ſuffering ſome little inquietude, and experiencing a few momentary alarms, it is raiſed again by a ſudden tranſport of joy, which evaporates and is gone in an inſtant.

Comedy has no efforts of virtue to make, but only thoſe of wit; where the mind is employed upon the means of giving a lucky turn to an affair: this conſtitutes the drollery of the principal character, and gives life and ſpirit to the ſcene. If the comic hero is unhappy, his misfortune is of the burleſque kind; as that of the

‡ This the author ſpeaks of his own country. The Engliſh are well known to give rather into the other extreme.

miſer,

miſer, whom we ſee robbed of his precious caſket, to oblige him to give up his miſtreſs to a lover, who deſerves her better than himſelf. Was the misfortune to be really ſerious, it might raiſe our concern, which is contrary to the rules and end of comedy; in which the unravelling ſhould always lie in the ſucceſs of the reaſonable characters, and in the ſhame and confuſion of the ridiculous ones of the piece.

CHAP. VI.

The epic action ſhould be marvellous.

WE have already ſaid, that the epic is the recital of a marvellous event. In this lies the proper diſtinction of the epic action from all others, if we may judge from the practice of Homer, Virgil, and ſome of the beſt moderns, who have had the greateſt opportunity, by the choice of their ſubjects, of following the examples pointed out to them by the ancients, in this kind of writing.

Any one, who makes the leaſt reflection on the manner in which the action in the Æneid begins, will immediately perceive the wide difference there is between the epic and the tragic action. There he ſees gods acting in every thing: Juno traverſes the air; the monarch of the winds raiſes a dreadful tempeſt againſt a mortal. In purſuing the poem to its concluſion, he ſtill finds ſupernatural beings concerned in every

every cauſe: but, is it by chance they make their appearance there? do they act without reaſon or deſign? are they placed there only for the ſake of ſhew and parade? or, may we not rather ſuppoſe, that there are ſome rules in reaſon and good ſenſe, which determine all their operations? The contrary is hardly natural to be believed.

And yet, we ſhould be led to believe it, to look into what writers have ſaid on this ſubject. Some ſee nothing but allegory in an epic poem; others, only the idea of a perfect and every way accompliſhed hero. Theſe regard the marvellous only as an adventitious quality, a part of the pagan dreſs of poetry, which no way belongs to the ſpecies itſelf: ſo that if any appearance of probability is thrown into a poetic recital, it is rather through complaiſance to the prejudices of the reader, than from any obligation of the rules of the art.

Let us examine things a little nearer, and know, for once, what we have to depend upon.

The origin of the marvellous.

All men love the marvellous; and this paſſion, which ſhews itſelf ſo very remarkably in children, does but change objects in thoſe of a more advanced age. For this reaſon, when people are telling a ſtory, if they cannot give you the marvellous, they at leaſt ſtrive to give

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you the ſingular, in order, by this means, to pleaſe their auditors as much as poſſible.

Thoſe who firſt ſet about compoſing narrations, did, by way of preference, make choice of the actions and exploits of great men; and as they made them all to be deſcended from the gods, it was very eaſy for them to ſuppoſe, that, in any difficulty or diſtreſs, theſe heroes were aſſiſted in a wonderful manner by the counſels or interpoſition of thoſe ſupernatural beings, to whom they owed their exiſtence.

This manner of intermingling gods and men in an action, had two advantages, ſuppoſing them properly adapted to the ideas of the hearers. In the firſt place, it gave a greater luſtre to the hero, and made the ſtory more intereſting; and, on the other hand, it ſtrongly confirmed the auditors in their belief of the deities being always preſent with them, in order to aſſiſt or puniſh them, according to their deſerts. This is the origin of the marvellous in the epic.

Succeeding great geniuſſes, in forming the plan of an epic poem, took into conſideration how they might beſt employ the ſuppoſed miniſtry of the gods. Upon conſulting the firſt ideas which preſented concerning the divinity, they found that the gods were the ſovereign arbiters of mankind, the beings thro' whom they moved, by whom they moved, and by whom they muſt be wholly guided. Hence they eaſily perceived,

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that if they took the licence of intermixing gods and men in the ſame action, the gods muſt naturally perform the functions of firſt cauſes, and men thoſe of ſecond; that the gods were to furniſh the means, and men to put them in execution: ſo that the plan of the action was ſettled in the council of the gods themſelves, and that the motions or ſteps taken by men on earth, were no other than the execution of theſe councils. So that by this means the poet had the power of painting in the ſame work, all heaven, hell, earth, gods and men, nature, ſociety, in a word, whatever exiſts in the univerſe, with their ſeveral relations and dependencies.

Nothing can be more eaſy than to demonſtrate, that this is not a chimerical ſyſtem, an airy idea, void of any ſolid foundation; we have the authority of Homer's own practice in the Iliad, and that of Virgil in the Æneid, to prove its reality; as will appear, by examining, with a little attention, the fable or ordonnance of the firſt book of this latter. Here the poet, entering the liſts like a champion in the fullneſs of his vigour, diſplays all the powers of his art and genius. Let us then follow him ſtep by ſtep, and obſerve how he proceeds.

The rules of common ſenſe dictate to him, that he is, in the firſt place, to make choice of a ſubject: this determines the ſcope or end of the poet in his undertaking, and forms a point

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of view for the reader. "I ſing the hero "who founded the Roman empire in deſpite of "all the efforts of an adverſe deity." This propoſition already appears to have that requiſite of the epic marvellous, which we have taken notice of above, viz. a god and a man.

The propoſition made, the poet next addreſſes himſelf to the muſes, to know from them the cauſes. "*Muſa mihi cauſas memora*; Muſe "tell the cauſe:" the events paſſed upon earth, in which men themſelves were the inſtruments. Therefore Virgil was in no want of being inſtructed as to the effects, but the firſt cauſes, which had been ſettled in heaven, and conſequently beyond the reach of his knowledge and conception.

The muſe then ſpeaks, and explains the cauſes of the reſentment of the deity. The cauſes being thus explained, the recital or epic begins.

The Trojans leave Sicily, and are out at ſea: here we have the object on which the wrath of Juno is to fall. The goddeſs immediately prepares a dreadful ſtorm: Æolus at her requeſt lets looſe the winds, and the whole fleet of Æneas is diſperſed. The hero had now periſhed, but for Neptune, who, diſpleaſed to ſee his empire thus diſturbed without his order, drove back the winds to their caverns, and reſtored the calm.

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This is the firſt picture, and in the true epic taſte. We behold Juno purſuing Æneas with the utmoſt hatred, and that unfortunate prince laboring under the perſecution. Here are two parts, one of which belongs to the gods, the other to men. Now join theſe two parts, as they are joined in the allegorical picture, and we have a ſubject which is denominated EPIC; that is, an image repreſenting natural and ſupernatural cauſes, with the effects ariſing from their mutual concurrence. The ſecond picture repreſents the Trojans as fatigued with the tempeſt, and repoſing themſelves upon the ſeaſhore: a picture entirely natural, and agreeable to the human ſtate. In the mean time the poet is preparing another, which is as wholly ſupernatural, and wherein nothing appears but the marvellous. Jupiter fixes his eyes attentively upon Æneas; Venus intercedes with the god in favor of her ſon; Mercury is ſent, to diſpoſe Dido, queen of Carthage, to give this unfortunate prince a favorable reception; and Venus herſelf deſcends to inſtruct her ſon in perſon, and conduct him to the palace of that princeſs.

Here we ſee the ſame machinery ſtill at work. Æneas is conducted by Venus, Dido is properly prepared by Mercury. Thus the gods diſpoſe the hearts of men, and direct their ſteps. Without the operation of theſe divine agents, what paſſed would have been no more than a com-

common adventure; a ſubject proper enough for a hiſtory indeed, but in no wiſe worthy of the Epic.

Æneas having met with a favourable reception at Carthage, inſtantly diſpatches the faithful Achates, to bring his ſon Aſcanius and preſent him to the queen. Here the poet places the ſpring that produces a paſſion in Dido for Æneas. It was neceſſary that this love ſhould be raiſed in her breaſt by a god: without this, it would have been no better than the paſſion in a romance. Cupid, therefore, takes the form of young Aſcanius, and under this diſguiſe breathes his poiſon into the heart of the queen.—This is the third picture.

The flame is now lighted by a ſupernatural cauſe; that is ſufficient: whatever reſults from this firſt impulſe, muſt be truly epic.

For tho' every thing in the epic action is ſuppoſed to be brought about by the gods; yet the poets do not introduce them upon every trifling circumſtance, and that for two reaſons. Firſt, becauſe they would find themſelves a good deal puzzled by theſe ſupernatural agents, whoſe preſence would often eclipſe the other perſonages, and overload the ſcene; nor could they be ſo frequently introduced with any degree of probability or variety. The ſecond reaſon, which is an admirable cloak to the weakneſs of a poet, is, that the greater dignity may be preſerved, by charging the gods with the firſt im-

impulſe only; which diſpoſing the ſecond cauſe with a degree of certainty to the end aſſigned, does more fully manifeſt the ſupreme power of the divine agent. Men, naturally weak and circumſcribed, and who form their reſolves with heſitation, are always in ſome meaſure diffident of the means they are to employ, and, conſequently, under a neceſſity of redoubling their care and aſſiduity during the courſe of the undertaking. But a god, the inſtant he acquits himſelf of the function of firſt cauſe, has already ſeen the effect produced, and leaves to ſubordinate cauſes to run through the other little circumſtances neceſſary to the execution. Cupid wounds Dido with one of his arrows; he then diſappears. The princeſs is left to herſelf, and to the circumſtances of her preſent ſituation. All the faculties of her ſoul will naturally be rouſed and put in action, to remove every obſtacle that preſents itſelf, to the attainment of the deſired end. Juno has obtained the promiſe of Æolus; that is ſufficient. Æolus gives his orders to the winds, and we ſhall ſee the queen of heaven obey'd.

This diſpoſition makes the gods the principal actors in the Epic, and they appear but from time to time; whilſt men, who are the under-characters, occupy almoſt the whole ſcene. This is juſt as the ſpectacle is deſign'd for men.

Virgil has, to the utmoſt of his power, purſued this plan throughout his work; and if he

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has now and then ſtruck off from it, it is thro' fear of a tireſome repetition, or becoming too little intereſting. But Homer has been more happy: he has been able to abide cloſe by it, particularly in his Iliad, which is the moſt extenſive treatiſe of pagan theology we have.

In fine, this is, of all others, the moſt reaſonable way of employing the marvellous: indeed, there is no other reaſonable way but this. For, after all, as ſoon as the gods are made agents, they muſt either hold the chief or the lower place; they muſt be either the firſt or the ſecond cauſes, for in this caſe there is no medium. Now, of theſe two different characters, there can be but one properly ſuited to them.

The marvellous is eſſential to the epic.

But is this kind of the marvellous abſolutely eſſential to an epic poem?

We ſhall not diſpute here about terms: we will only aſk, what is to be underſtood by an epic poem? is it every poem in general that has the form of a narrative? if ſo, it is the form only which conſtitutes its nature. The conſpiracy of Pierre, the murder of Agamemnon, and any other dramatic ſubjects thrown into the form of a narrative, are ſo many epic poems: and Lucan, and ſeveral others, will no longer deſerve the reproach of being hiſtorians in verſe.

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Is it an unity of action? but this qualification is common to every action in a poem, and is a rule to which every art of taſte is equally ſubmitted.

Perhaps it may be, the greatneſs and extent of the action itſelf. But be a man great or mean, he is neither more nor leſs a man.

Is it that the poem is heroic? every tragedy is ſo, as well as the epic.

What then is left us to characteriſe the eſſence of this poem? The interpoſition of a deity. *Per ambages deorumq; miniſteria; fabuloſumque ſententiarum tormentum precipitandus eſt liber ſpiritus.* That is to ſay, in poems of this kind, the ſecret ſprings by which the divine power acts upon mankind ſhould be unfolded, and the intricate and myſterious ways of fate *(ambages)* laid open. The deities ſhould be put into motion, and be made to intereſt themſelves in the action which is carrying on by men: they ſhould even act in them, with them, by them, and for them, *(deorum miniſteria.)* In fine, the genius of the poet, freed from the chains of truth, *liber ſpiritus*, ſhould precipitate itſelf into the immenſe ſpace of fiction, and from thence take its machinery, its moving powers, *tormentum fabuloſum*, in order to produce the propoſed effect.

Petronius, not contented with the precept drawn from the example of Homer and Virgil, gives us a piece of poetry of his own for a mo-

model; wherein he makes the god of hell irritating Fortune againſt the Roman people, and engaging her to puniſh them. This latter conſents, and prepares the fatal blow.

Iſocrates, an orator remarkable for his juſt and philoſophical notions of things, compares the panegyrics made by poets, and thoſe compoſed by an orator. "Poets, ſays he, have "the advantage over us three different ways. "Firſt, they have the liberty of introducing "ſupernatural agents, which, in their proper "time and place, give a greater light and "ſtrength to the character of the hero whom "they celebrate. In the ſecond place, they "enjoy an infinite number of peculiar privi- "leges with regard to elocution. Laſtly, they "have the additional charms of rhime and "meaſure." By this it appears, that Iſocrates look'd upon the intervention of the divinity, as one of the greateſt advantages poets had over orators, and as what makes one part of the beautiful in poetry; conſequently he ſuppoſes, that he who is a poet in the true ſenſe of the word, and knows how to make a proper uſe of the privilege of his art, will not fail to employ it on every ſuitable occaſion.

What is the object of an epic poem? every body knows it is to excite admiration. Now, where ſhall we find a more natural and ſure method of compaſſing this, than to employ the wonderful to demonſtrate the action of the divi-

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nity on man, and the ſecret force by which it over-rules him?

In fine, aſk any one who has read the moſt celebrated epic poems, antient and modern, what idea he formed of them? what he thought particularly characteriſed this ſpecies of poetry? will he not readily anſwer, the workings of the deity? This will be the chief differential quality that will preſent itſelf to his mind. He will perceive, at one caſt of the eye, Æneas and Juno, Achilles and Jupiter, Ulyſſes and Minerva, Adam and Satan.

Moreover, this ſyſtem is in every reſpect noble: it is worthy of thoſe to whom it is attributed. Can there be an object more beautiful and grand, more ſuitable to a genius nearly divine, than to demonſtrate, in the courſe of an extenſive work, the dependance and ſubordination of cauſes, and to repreſent mankind, or rather the whole univerſe, in action, under the eye and in the hand of the ſupreme Being? can there be a better way of bringing back poetry to its original ſource?

It has been aſſerted, that Chriſtianity could never be made conformable to this ſpecies of poetry.

De la foi d'un Chretien les miſteres terribles,
D'ornemens egayès ne ſont point ſuſceptibles,
L'Evangile a l'eſprit n'offre de tous cotès,
Que penitence à faire, et tourmens meritès.

BOILEAU.

The rigid myſteries of the Chriſtian faith,
Reject the muſes, and their flowery wreath;
We meet with nought thro'out the code ſevere,
But ſins t'atone, or puniſhments to bear.

Notwithſtanding the reſpect we have for the opinion of this great writer, we cannot but think, that, was another Homer to ariſe, he would find, in the hiſtory of our religion, ample matter to exerciſe his genius. It is true, he might not, indeed, repreſent a Jupiter thundering on mount Ida: we might not ſee gods and goddeſſes mingle in a croud of mortal combatants, covered over with duſt, and reciprocally attacking and overcoming each other. But with what energy, what maſterly force, would he paint the God who created the univerſe with a word; who ſees and comprehends every thing, and gives life and being to all! How delightful muſt it be to follow ſuch a poet, while with a ſoul inflamed with thoſe ideas that fill'd the minds of the prophets and other ſacred writers; ideas produced by religion; he paints a hero, imagining, attempting, and executing the greateſt things; always under the immediate will and guidance of a celeſtial ſpirit, which gives him prudence to foreſee, fortitude to encounter, and courage and patience to ſurmount, the obſtacles in his way! Like Milton, he might perhaps chooſe the Fall of Man for his ſubject; or, like Taſſo, deſcribe the Conqueſt of Jeruſalem, and

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even deſcend to ſubjects yet more familiar: but ſtill we ſhould hear a Homer ſing, whoſe maſterly execution would plainly demonſtrate, that the ſublime and the ſolemn are ſo far from being invincible obſtacles to epic writing, that they would in him appear the ſources of the fineſt ſtrokes and moſt exalted beauties.

But on what baſis could he have ſupported this kind of the marvellous? On the ſame which ſerved the antients for theirs; I mean, the general perſuaſion of the people for whom they wrote.

After having made choice of a ſubject that would admit of the marvellous, either from the diſtance of time it happened in, from the nobleneſs of the object, from the reality of the fact, or laſtly, from the general received opinion concerning it; the poet would in the firſt place ſuppoſe what is true in the principles of every religion, that the event had been originally prepared by a deity.

In the next place, he would ſuppoſe that the divinity followed it into execution, either in perſon, or by means of other agents. If Homer could take upon him to aſſert, that Juno, Minerva, or Mars, had each a part in the actions of the Greeks and Trojans, altho' theſe deities had only a mere poetical exiſtence, founded on the general opinion of the over-ruling providence of the gods; with how much greater reaſon might the poet employ the agency of ſupernatu-

ral beings in the Chriſtian religion, where it is an acknowleged truth, that God has, at certain times, ſent the miniſters of his power to puniſh nations, diſcomfit armies, or protect a diſtreſſed people? If a poet has the power of realiſing what is in itſelf but barely poſſible, he may, with much greater reaſon, aſſert the exiſtence of a thing in ſuch or ſuch a caſe, when ſomething like it, or perhaps the very ſame thing, has actually exiſted in another caſe.

Laſtly, the Chriſtian poet would ſuppoſe, that ſome celeſtial ſpirit, to whom all the ſecret ſprings of ſupernatural power were known, had revealed the ſame to him. And though this laſt ſuppoſition would be, in fact, but an artful turn, to develop, in a more pleaſing manner, the chain of ſuperiority and dependence ſubſiſting between God and man; yet the reader, without ſearching too deeply into the merits of it, willingly yields his aſſent; and whether it be from the licence allowed to poetry, whether from the reſemblance of what is told us with our general belief, or laſtly, from that ſtrain of revelation which reigns through the whole of an epic ſtory: from whatever of theſe motives it may ariſe, I ſay, we certainly as readily fall in with the operations of the marvellous that were never manifeſted to our eyes, and allow them as much credit, as we do to the moſt common actions of thoſe heroes and great men, of which

we

we meet with daily inſtances in civil life or hiſtory. We have an example of this in Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, which is moſt admirable in the marvellous of it, while it keeps within the bounds of thoſe notions we receive from the Chriſtian faith. What can be more beautiful than his deſcription of the wiles and artifices employed by the tempter of mankind? the converſation of the angels who preſide over the planets, rivers, and mountains? than the ſpeech of the Son of God, when he offers himſelf to his father as a ranſom for loſt man; and the prophetic narrative of Raphael, when he ſets before the eyes of Adam the hiſtory of his poſterity.

But if the eſſence of the epic conſiſts in the intervention of the gods, any ſubject will make an epic, whether in itſelf noble or not. We admit the conſequence.

It matters not whether an action is in itſelf great or trivial, noble or not; if a god is one of the perſonages, it is a ſubject for the epic. It may not, perhaps, be altogether ſo heroic in this caſe, but it will not be leſs epic: juſt as comedy is dramatic, without being confined, like tragedy, to the heroic only.

This however muſt be allowed, that if a deity, who is the object of our reſpect, is introduced in a ſolemn manner, it will be but decent and proper to give him ſuch an object, as, according to our conceptions, appears moſt ſuited

to him; and to join him with ſuch characters in the action, as are in themſelves of ſome dignity and conſequence. But if the ſubject be rather pleaſant than ſerious; ſuch as the ſtealing a lock of hair, or the replacing a reading-deſk; then we may employ the comic miniſters of ſome pagan deity, or typical ſpirit, who, by virtue of imaginary power, ſupplies the place of ſupernatural machinery. So that, ſtrictly ſpeaking, the epic may be diſtinguiſhed into two kinds, both of them marvellous; the one heroic, the other comic; with this reſtriction, that the heroic epic alone is intitled to the characteriſtic title of the epic poem.

Method of employing the marvellou.

The marvellous being the eſſence of the epic, there are two things to be conſidered in relation to it; viz. in what manner, and when, it is to be employed. But we muſt firſt of all diſtinguiſh deities into two kinds, the one real, the other allegorical or imaginary.

The firſt of theſe are conſidered as beings that really exiſt and act; as Jupiter, Cupid, and Neptune, in fable. The other are only types or images made uſe of to repreſent ſome paſſion, or a part of nature, as Diſcord, Peace, &c.

Sometimes the real deities appear only in allegorical characters: thus Jupiter is put for the the Air or Heaven, Neptune for the Sea, Cupid for

for Love, &c. The imaginary deities ſhould never be introduced but once, and that in a curſory manner; becauſe this is properly no other than a kind of eloquent floriſh, and it would appear highly ridiculous to give a continued and permanent character to a rhetorical figure. Thus Diſcord would be only a motionleſs machine, a dead and ſenſeleſs being in an epic poem, unleſs diſtinctly imperſonated; as in the Lutrin of Boileau.

When the real deities have mixed characters, and appear ſometimes real, ſometimes allegorical, then the allegory ſhould convey ſuch a literal ſenſe, as may carry with it the appearance of reality. Thus when Minerva checks the fury of Achilles, in act to throw his ſpear at Agamemnon, it ſignifies no more, than that the hero recovered his prudence and reaſon; and conſequently this action of Minerva is no other than an allegory. But as that goddeſs is to act as a real perſonage throughout the reſt of the poem, ſhe is therefore here drawn as an exiſtent being: ſhe ſeizes the hero by his locks, he turns his head, ſees the ſparkling eyes of the goddeſs, immediately knows, hears, and obeys her: ſo that we may here chooſe either the real or the imaginary.

But when they appear in real characters, and ſuch as properly belong to perſonal agents, the practice of the painter will help to ſhew us what

ought to be that of the poet in this caſe. The painter, when employed on a myſtical ſubject, ſometimes places his celeſtial perſonages in the air, and ſometimes mixes them with the group of human figures. Let us now apply this to the epic wonderful.

Man, as ſuppoſed to have a general knowlege of a divine influence on his actions, is either wholly unacquainted with the ſecret ſprings of this divine and ſupernatural influence, or he knows them in part. In the firſt caſe, the action of the gods is, as it were, diſtinct from thoſe of men: the hero aſcribes whatever he performs to natural cauſes, becauſe he cannot perceive the ſupernatural ſprings which ſet the machinery a-going, and which is alone reſerved for the eyes of the reader. In the ſecond caſe, the gods are mixed promiſcuouſly with men; they take a human figure, generally that of ſome well known perſon; becauſe, did they appear as ſtrangers, it would cauſe a confuſion in the action which is going on. The god then acts wholly as a man, and gives no token of his being a god, but that of vaniſhing.

There is yet a third method of operation, which in ſome ſort relates to the ſecond, and that is, by the means of dreams, night viſions, &c.

In the firſt of theſe, the gods act as abſolute maſters and ſovereign arbiters, who ſettle and determine the fate of men in a deſpotic manner

among

among themſelves: this is the moſt ſtriking light they can be repreſented in; and thus we find Juno, Æolus, and Jupiter, acting in the firſt book of the Æneid.

The ſecond method has leſs dignity: here the gods ſeem to act with a limited power, and as if neceſſitated to accommodate themſelves to the laws of human nature, in order to conduct men in the way they would have them go; as when Venus and her ſon interfere in the care of Æneas, in the ſame book.

In the third, the gods appear with ſtill leſs majeſty, and ſtrike us with much leſs awe, becauſe we are here at liberty to take the divine oracles for the mere effects of imagination. Of this kind is the counſel and advice which Æneas, from time to time, receives from his father's ghoſt.

Were the gods to appear as gods, ſurrounded with all their majeſty and glory, they would ſo aſtoniſh and terrify man, that the greatneſs of his ſurpriſe would take from him the power of thinking and acting: therefore, what they effected in ſuch circumſtances would be rather a miracle than a part of the marvellous. But it is abſolutely neceſſary that we carefully diſtinguiſh between the two, as it is not the miraculous, but only the marvellous, that takes place in an epic poem: for a miracle is a reverſing of the order of nature, by the firſt cauſe acting, either of itſelf, and independent of any ſecond

cauſe, or by employing ſome other ſecond cauſe than that originally made for producing ſuch an effect. If an iſland is ſaid to fly thro' the air, this is miraculous, becauſe the firſt cauſe has raiſed this iſland by its own power, or by the aſſiſtence of ſome force which was not originally prepared in nature for that operation.

The epic marvellous then, while reſtrained within the bounds of reaſon and good ſenſe, only draws the veil which had hitherto concealed the machinery of nature from our ſight, and ſhews us the manner in which the deity acts with regard to human affairs: but when once it tranſgreſſes theſe limits, it is no other than the idle ſally of a diſordered imagination.

In effect, would this marvellous pleaſe, if it was not conformable to truth, and only the work of a vague or exuberant fancy? *Nothing is beautiful but what is true.* Homer enchants me; but not when he makes a river leave its bed to purſue a man, and Vulcan running armed with fire to force this river back again. I admire Virgil; but I do not like his *nymphs* changed into *ſhips*. My mind deteſts every thing that bears a character ſo over-ſtrained and unnatural, *incredulus odi:* nature has not guided the pencil: ſuch ſtories are only fit to amuſe children and old women.

However, I like theſe flights, provided they are but ſhort, much better than the cold accuracy and heavy niceneſs of an author, who never

never loſes ſight of the ſhore, and is always running a-ground through cowardice. *Eſt quoddam prodire tenùs, ſi non datur ultra.* And if the condition of the human mind be ſuch, that it cannot always keep within the paths of truth, I ſhould be much fonder of the character that preſſes onward to the goal with force and vigor, than one whoſe timidity will never ſuffer it to reach it.

Of the ordering the marvellous.

Though it may be agreeable to truth to ſay, that the divinity interferes with all the actions of mankind; yet it ſeems neceſſary, to keep up the dignity of this great cauſe, that it ſhould be repreſented as concerned only in actions of importance; and even then only in the moſt intereſting parts of them; and when man, if left to himſelf, might probably, for want of underſtanding or ſtrength, have deviated from the end to which the gods had deſtined him. Homer is very faulty in this reſpect, by making his deities interfere in every trifling circumſtance. Achilles, for inſtance, throws his lance at Hector, which miſſes him; now, inſtead of ſimply ſaying he took another, it muſt, forſooth, be the very ſame, and he muſt have a god to bring it him back. Menelaüs lets fall his whip; he immediately invokes Minerva on the occaſion, who picks it up and gives it him: and ſo in ſeveral

other places. It is certain, that the intervention of the gods, and of the little ſervices they are continually rendering the hero, adds to his conſequence, and greatly conduces to forming the true character of the epic, the marvellous: but it is at the ſame time conſiderably debaſing the character of the deity. There is, however, a way of reconciling theſe two ſeeming contrarieties, by giving us to perceive, that the divinity is introduced in this caſe only in an allegorical manner, to give a greater life and dignity to ſome particular circumſtance. Thus, at the funeral of Patroclus, when the pile is to be lighted, we ſee Aquilo and Boreas ruſhing from the extremities of the horizon, bounding on the waves, and making the foreſts bow beneath their blaſts: this is all allegory and fiction. Again, the Simois and Scamander leave their channels, which are choaked with dead bodies: this is ſtill allegorical. Mars ſhouts amidſt the Trojans, with a voice like that of ten thouſand warriors; which is to expreſs the cry of onſet given by the firmly joined ſquadrons, who are here conſidered poetically as a god, to render the thing more ſpirited and wonderful.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

The probability of the epic action.

AFTER what has been ſo largely ſaid upon the marvellous, it will be no hard matter to reconcile it with probability.

The marvellous conſiſts in laying open the unknown ſprings of great operations.

The probability of this marvellous conſiſts in repreſenting theſe ſprings in a manner agreeable to the received opinions of thoſe for whom we write.

Now if the poet declares himſelf inſpired by a genius who aſſiſts at the council of the gods, where he has ſeen the principle and the ſecret cauſes of things, then there will be two ways of making us believe the wonderful which he preſents us. Firſt, he ſhews us ſuch things as reſemble thoſe we believe; ſecondly, he tells them with an air of authority and reſolution. The religious tone ſhakes, and the probability of the thing convinces. We hear a ſublime voice; we feel a fire that warms us; we diſcover the ideas we have of the conduct of the divinity, with regard to men: beſides this, we behold heroes, actions, manners, painted in characters we underſtand; we forget the fiction, we venerate it as truth, we admire all theſe objects: if they do not exiſt, they deſerve to exiſt:

and

and nature would be the gainer, if ſhe was as beautiful as art. Thus we willingly believe it is nature herſelf; and may we not ſay it is her, ſince we believe it?

CHAP. VIII.

Allegory is not eſſential to the epic action.

HOwever ſingular an opinion may be in itſelf, when once a man of genius takes it in his head to demonſtrate it, he is never at a loſs for arguments and authorities to make it received, at leaſt in a certain degree; eſpecially if the matter happens to be, in its own nature, ſubtile and embarraſſing: and ſuppoſing he convinces but a few, he will, however, throw many into doubt and uncertainty about it. Moreover, the number of half-proofs which he artfully throws in, and repreſents in the moſt advantageous light for this purpoſe, ſerves to perplex the matter ſtill more, and render the difficulty greater to thoſe who would attempt to clear it up; who, by this means, often find themſelves reduced to ſubmit, rather than engage in a long and tedious diſcuſſion.

Something nearly of this kind has happened with reſpect to father Boſſu, who, having long ſtudied the nature of the epic, pretends to have given a neater and clearer expoſi-

tion

tion of it, than any that ever went before him. His book was received with the greateſt applauſe. As he advanced a new ſyſtem, ſome parts of which was generally known and allowed, theſe gave credit to the reſt, and the whole went down. However, ſeveral men of letters took it once more into examination; and tho' they all allowed father Boſſu's ſyſtem to be the work of one who had well ſtudied the matter; yet they could not but be ſenſible that the method he has adopted therein, is by far too laborious to have been ever followed by thoſe poets whoſe works he quotes as his authorities.

He pretends, in the firſt place, that the epic poem, to which the antients ſometimes gave the name of fable, is really no more than what is now-a-days called a *Fable*, or Tale; and is to be underſtood in the ſame ſenſe, as when we give the name of fables to the fictions of Æſop *. That the epic action is intended for nothing but to contain and inculcate ſome moral truth; and, laſtly, that in compoſing an epic poem, we muſt begin by fixing this truth in the ſame manner, as when we would make a fable.

To obviate a multiplicity of objections, we will agree with father Boſſu, that there is a moral to be drawn from an epic action.

* See Boſſu's treatiſe on epic poetry, B. I. ch. 9.

But

But then he muſt allow, with us, that this is not peculiar to this ſort of action, ſince it is equally true with reſpect to all human actions whatever; there not being a ſingle one without its rule, to which it may be reduced as to a principle, by the help of an analyſis; (ex. gr.) ſuch a good action has been recompenſed, ſuch a bad one puniſhed; therefore we muſt do good, and avoid evil: here is the moral. Again, ſuch a good action has been attended with bad ſucceſs; ſuch a bad action has ſucceeded happily: hence, ſays the moral, we are not to frame our judgments of mankind from their condition or fortune. Thus all kinds of hiſtory, be they well or ill executed, are ſo many treatiſes of morality: there is not a ſingle ſtroke in them, which does not contain its ſeeds of inſtruction. Shall we then conclude, that the remarkable paſſages in hiſtory are mere fables, like thoſe of Æſop?

It may be ſaid, there is a great difference with reſpect to hiſtorical paſſages. Hiſtory is a true narration, offered to the reader only for the truth of its facts; whereas the epic is a mere invention, a fiction. But what is the end of inventing, unleſs for the ſake of inſtruction, and to give a form and body to ſome period intereſting for morality?

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In the firſt place, it is far from being true, that the intention of hiſtory is merely to repreſent the truth of facts. Hiſtory is a leſſon given mankind to learn from the experience of paſt times. This is its true end; but this is not the point in queſtion.

But what occaſion is there for fiction in epic? I may aſk the ſame queſtion; To what purpoſe is a courſe of fiction for upwards of fifteen thouſand verſes, only to teach us that the Greeks, when divided among themſelves, are not ſo ſtrong and powerful, as when united? Or, in other words, that two are not ſo ſtrong as four: that Ulyſſes's abſence from his houſe and family has cauſed great diſorders there: or, in other words, that the preſence of the maſter is neceſſary to his affairs? What need, I may ſay, of ſo long a chain of fiction; the old man's bundle of rods * would have taught us the firſt of theſe truths in half a dozen lines; and the ſtory of the ſtag † in the ox-ſtall, would have demonſtrated the ſecond. We muſt then ſuppoſe, that ſo great a work had ſome object more proportioned to the dignity of its undertaking.

But why muſt there be fiction? For this reaſon; to ſet before us ſuch examples of perfection, as are not to be met with in common life,

* Æſop's Fables, Fab. 146. † Idem, Fab. 18.

or the events related in hiſtory. To furniſh an opportunity of demonſtrating the principles in which the religion, ſociety, and government of thoſe for whom we write, are founded, in the reports of a particular action calculated for that purpoſe; it is to paint with freedom the manners and cuſtoms of a people in peace and war; and to convey a thorough knowlege of mankind, their paſſions, vices, virtues, ſtrength, and weakneſs. What one ſingle action in hiſtory is capable of uniting ſo many different things together? The pictures we meet with in hiſtory, are but eſſays; at beſt thoſe of philoſophy are lifeleſs and dry: it was poetry alone that could paint theſe objects to the life, and give them beauty, ſtrength, and vigor. This is the reaſon of employing fiction, and to avoid overwhelming a ſingle moral in an ocean of other incidents. And where a maxim was, perhaps, intended as the baſis of a ſtate, would not its own littleneſs, when compared with the greatneſs and continuance of the action, of which it was the reſult, always cauſe an inſupportable diſproportion?

Beſides, does this idea of the epic action, do leſs honor to Homer, than his allegory? We ſhall preſently prove Homer to be a great maſter of morality; but it will be by other kinds of argu-

argument than thoſe of father Boſſu, which are theſe:

1. Becauſe Horace tells us that Homer teaches the duties of life better than either Crator or Chryſippus. From hence our reverend father concludes, that the Iliad is a fable, like one of Æſop's *.

But might not Horace, with equal juſtice, have ſaid the ſame thing, in the ſame ſenſe, of any well executed piece of hiſtory whatever? What does he mean to teach us by this? only that the examples preſented by Homer are more ſtriking, and leave a more laſting impreſſion than the dry precepts and uncouth maxims met with in the writings of philoſophers.

2. Next, becauſe Ariſtotle has ſaid that the fable of a poem is a compoſition of ſeveral things, father Boſſu concludes, that one of theſe is the fiction, the other the moral inſtruction †. This is ſeeing what we have a mind to ſee, but not what really is. All the world, father Boſſu excepted, agree that the fable of a poem is no other than an expoſition of the action, together with all its circumſtances. It is properly the aſſemblage and aſſortment of the parts which are to compoſe the whole. Father Mambrun compares the fable to the ſketch of a painter drawn after a

* Treatiſe on epic poetry, book I. chap. 2. † Ibid. chap. 6.

plan;

plan; for inſtance, ſet a painter to draw Alexander's triumphant entry into Babylon; here is a ſubject and an action given: but this is not yet the fable. But let this painter draw a city, adorned with the moſt magnificent buildings, crouded with innumerable ſhoals of people, together with whatever could be ſuppoſed to have accompanied the triumph of the conqueror of Aſia. This is the fable of the picture; this is what Ariſtotle calls the compoſition of things.

3. The Romans, ſays he, always made uſe of the word *docere*, to teach, to ſignify the compoſition of tragedies or comedies; therefore tragedies are leſſons and inſtructions in the ſame nature, with fables. But does not having recourſe to ſuch weak ſubtility betray great want of real proofs? *Docere* is an helleniſm, a literal tranſlation of διδάσκειν, made uſe of by the Greeks, to ſignify giving a piece to the players to learn. But here follows Father Boſſu's chief and grand proof of all. According to Ariſtotle we muſt firſt begin by forming a general fable; that is to ſay, by laying the plan of the action without naming the actors; as for inſtance: we ſuppoſe A. and B. hold together, and while in this ſtate are ſuperior to their enemy; they ſeparate, and then their enemy has the advantage over them. This is the caſe in the quarrel

quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles; or, in other words, the fable of the Iliad in its general ſtate *.

Now ſays F. Boſſu, to conſtruct an univerſal fable after this manner, we muſt neceſſarily have ſome point of morality, which is to ſerve as the foundation to the fable we would conſtruct. Thus in the fable of the wolf and the lamb the action is built on this moral, that the ſtrongeſt are always in the right. Conſequently the epic action ſhould alſo carry a moral, and therefore muſt of neceſſity be allegorical, as that in the fable before us. But this appears ſtill plainer in comedy (this is an obſervation from Ariſtotle.) When the poet has a mind to compoſe a piece; ſuch as the Miſer, for inſtance, his principal deſign is to paint the ridiculouſneſs of avarice. To do this he ſuppoſes an action: the action ſuppoſed, he gives the actors the names of Harpagon, Valere, &c.

So in the epic, the poet firſt chuſes a moral. (*Ex. gr.*) *We can do all things when the Gods are for us.* Then he raiſes a general action upon this moral, viz. *A Prince protected by the Gods arrives in a ſtrange country, where he ſettles himſelf in oppoſition to all who withſtand him.* But then, as ſoon as the actors are named, the action ceaſes to be general. The prince is Æneas; the coun-

* Book I. chap. 7.

try

try is Italy; the opponents are Amatas and Turnus; and as the author quits his moral to conceal Æneas, in the ſame manner does the reader quit Æneas to reſume the moral; and in this it is, according to Ariſtotle, that the epic is more philoſophical and moral, than hiſtory.

F. Boſſu perfectly well comprehends the principles laid down by Ariſtotle; but the conſequences he draws from them, are by no means neceſſary ones.

But we muſt frame a general fable: but why? becauſe poetry paints things ſuch as they ſhould be, not as they really have been. So that a poet in treating an hiſtorical fact, treats of it as if it belonged to one in particular, and had never exiſted, that is to ſay, without any regard to names, perſons, or places. Virgil, for the ſubject of his poem, choſe the ſettling of the Trojans in Italy, under the conduct of a chief called Æneas; but the poet riſes above hiſtory in all he ſays; he foretells that his hero is called Æneas; that he is only to relate his eſtabliſhment in Italy, with its hiſtorical circumſtances; and diſpoſed rather to give pictures than portraits, he paints a hero with every quality that can conſtitute a wonderful man; and as to his eſtabliſhment he ſets that forth with all the circumſtances that can render it ſurpriſing. After this he affixes to each character the name proper to it, calls his ideal hero

Æneas,

Æneas, and this eſtabliſhment he has been deſcribing is that of the Trojans in Italy *. Now to generaliſe an action in this manner, we muſt ſet out with a vague moral, which may lead to every thing, becauſe it leads determinately to nothing?

In making a fable, like one of Æſop's, we have the moral firſt, that is certain; but a fable of this kind is nothing but a metaphor, a compariſon which neceſſarily preſuppoſes ſome idea. Thus inſtead of ſaying the reaſons of the ſtrongeſt are always the beſt, may I not ſay, is a lamb ever in the right againſt a wolf? then it is only a metaphor: or ſuppoſing I have a mind to draw a compariſon from it, I will ſay, a weak and innocent man, oppoſed to a tyrannical and unjuſt one, is like a lamb oppoſed to a wolf. Laſtly, I have a mind to form a fable from this; I ſay a wolf ſought to pick a quarrel with a lamb; this latter, though it had reaſon on its ſide, fell a victim to the former. It is evident that this fa-

* The orators themſelves follow this method; they generaliſe their cauſes. From an hypotheſis they frame a theſis, as the maſters of the art tells us. *Nam quoniam quicquid eſt quod in controverſia verſatur, in eo aut ſit ne, aut quid ſit, aut quale ſit quæritur .... Orator .... a propriis perſonis, & temporibus ſemper; ſi poteſt avocat controverſiam. Latius enim de genere quam de parte diſceptare licet.— Hæc igitur quæſtio a propriis perſonis & temporibus ad univerſi generis orationem traducta appellatur theſis.* Cic. Orat. 14.

ble

ble enters into both compariſon and metaphor. But ſuppoſe we ſhould ſay that the Iliad or Eneid is only a metaphor, a compariſon? F. Boſſu muſt allow it, or intirely abandon his allegorical ſyſtem.

In framing the fable of a comedy, I am ſenſible that one does not always begin by the choice of the action. But as there are two ſorts of comedies; the one of character, the other of intrigue, it is falſe reaſoning to cite the one for the other. The comedy of character does not begin by the action, becauſe one does not act merely for acting ſake, but to paint the manners of the perſon who acts. So that the character is here the poet's object, and it is by the choice of the character that he muſt begin. But, in the comedy of intrigue, where a man who thinks himſelf very cunning is to be impoſed upon; or a miſerly father cheated out of his ſuperfluous caſh; there the action is the firſt thing: and the difference between theſe two kinds of comedy is, that in the one the action follows the character, in the other the character follows the action.

Laſtly, the action is wholly feigned, or wholly true, or it is either partly true, or partly feigned.

If wholly true, both action and actors muſt have ſubſiſted before the poet's work, whoſe office, in that caſe, is to heighten the reality, puſh the characters, deepen the plot, and prepare the unra-

unravelling with all the art in his power, and as far as nature will poſſibly admit.

When the action is wholly feigned, the poet muſt have ſuppoſed an enterpriſe, invented means, created actors and characters to put theſe means in motion, and laſtly, have beſtowed names on theſe actors: and this is all that is abſolutely eſſential, and there appears no more neceſſity of adjuſting a point of morality in creating this action, than there does in performing a real one of whatever kind. When a General gives battle, or attacks a fort, does he conſider beforehand of the moral that may, or ſhould reſult from his undertaking? He thinks of the means and the end, and nothing more; for the point of morality, if one muſt be had, will neceſſarily be found without being ſought.

When the action is partly true, partly feigned, the poet adds, from his own invention, ſuch new deſigns and means to the real part of it, as he thinks neceſſary: theſe means prepared, he creates the actors, who are to put them in motion: this is all that is neceſſary here. The creation of actors only follows upon the creation of the additional part. *(Ex. gr.)* It is feigned that ſpies have been ſent into the enemies camp or town; this enterpriſe ſuppoſed, it is then attributed to ſuch actors as the fancy pleaſes to figure to itſelf. What occaſion is there to have recourſe to a fundamental point of morality for a

few adventitious circumſtances? and if not for the circumſtances, why for the main action? we muſt repeat it, that F. Boſſu has not done ſufficient honor to the poets whom he undertakes to praiſe. Homer does not teach a ſingle truth alone, but has given us an entire and complete treatiſe of morality. The nobleneſs of his work exacted no leſs. Is it to be ſuppoſed that he would have tortured himſelf to make fifteen thouſand verſes for the ſake of a ſingle point of morality? this may be ſaid of a fable of Æſop, which is no more than a ſhort enigma to exerciſe the reader's penetration for a little while, and inſtruct while it amuſes him. But that this ſhould be extended to the ſublime ſtructure of a poem like the Iliad or Æneid; Ariſtotle himſelf would have ſaid, could hardly have been credited.

It is well known that the ancients, more eſpecially the Aſiatics, had a great taſte for allegory, and what is allegory, but a tranſparent veil which is made uſe of partly to conceal ſome one thing. But does it follow that there can be no other thing to be diſguiſed or enveloped but a point of morality? But ſuppoſing all the characters in the Æneid to be wholly allegorical; that Æneas repreſents Auguſtus, another character Agrippa, another, if you will, Mecenas, what does all this prove? that a point of morality is eſſential to the epic. It proves indeed,

deed, that the poet was an excellent artiſt and refined courtier. Had Rome, Auguſtus, or the Roman empire never exiſted, would the Æneid have been leſs an epic poem to us for that? Rubens the famous painter had three wives, which it is ſaid he has painted under the figures of the three Graces, in one of his hiſtorical pieces. What is it now to the real beauty and perfection of this piece that thoſe three figures are real portraits? Would Rubens have been leſs a painter, ſuppoſing them to have been the effects of his imagination? I ſhould be glad to learn from F. Boſſu what particular hero in hiſtory is repreſented under the character of Achilles, Ulyſſes, or Neſtor. If he cannot ſatisfy me in this point, then let him acknowlege, that the reſemblance of Æneas with Auguſtus, and of the Æneid with the Roman empire is no ways eſſential to that piece as an epic poem.

But Achilles, Ulyſſes, and Neſtor, are characteriſtic images, ſymbols of valor, prudence, and eloquence; in a word, they are vices and virtues impersonated in an allegorical manner.

Are not all the perſonages of an hiſtory equally the images of vices or virtues? can they be deſcribed without their manners and actions? The name ſignifies nothing to thoſe who read an epic poem in the manner F. Boſſu would have it read, viz. with a philoſophical mind. Alexander, Cæſar, Pompey, and Nero, accord-

ing to him, differ from Achilles, Neſtor, and Ulyſſes only, as the one are perhaps mere ideal names, whereas the others are real ones. But what are names to a philoſopher?

But how then is poetry, according to Ariſtotle, more inſtructive and moral than hiſtory? Thus,

The poetic paintings not being copied ſtrictly after nature, but rather formed upon the ideal model of perfection, are for that reaſon generally found more forcible and ſtriking. They repreſent valor and prudence, not ſimply, as they are ſhewed in any particular hero, but ſuch as it is poſſible they may be; whereas the models in hiſtory, thoſe eſpecially which could be ſet to view only in a ſingle action founded on reality, would want the neceſſary degree of force, extent, and elevation, to make a proper impreſſion.

Let us conclude then that the epic is no otherwiſe a fable, than in the ſenſe that Ariſtotle gives to the word, as being a regular whole compoſed of things either true or feigned, in all or a few of the parts. For what occaſion is there to throw obſcurity and confuſion upon the nature of things? can nothing be beautiful or fine but in proportion as it is difficult to perform or comprehend?

But why ſo very earneſt, it may be ſaid, againſt Father Boſſu? would the epic be leſs eſtimable,

eſtimable, ſuppoſing his notion was to take place?

Perhaps not; but, 1. That idea is very dull and phlegmatic: can I think of reading over 15000 verſes, merely to ſee whether ſuch or ſuch a point of morality will exactly reſult from them? 2. It throws a confuſion into the whole piece; nothing can be more difficult than to reduce ſo many different actions and parts to one ſingle metaphyſical point. 3. It has conſequences which cannot be admitted.

If the epic is really an Æſop's fable, every poem, that is trully a poem, muſt have the ſame quality, whether tragedy, or comedy; no work of this ſort could be perfect in its kind, if it did not contain ſome important precept. If ſo, how many tragedies of Corneille, Racine, Shakeſpear, and other dramatic poets; how many comedies of Ariſtophanes, Plautus, Terence, and the beſt of our moderns are there, from whence it is impoſſible to draw any one ſingle maxim that ſhall contain the whole? or if it is drawn, it will have all the marks of violence and conſtraint, and appear the pure effect of art. In this caſe, theſe pieces would be no more true dramatic poems than Taſſo's Jeruſalem, Milton's Paradiſe loſt, or the Camoens would be true epic poems, according to F. Boſſu. This relates indeed to the name only; but then the name

fixes the idea of the nature of the things called by it.

But we will leave the reader to judge of F. Boſſu's ſyſtem, and of his conciſe and clear way of definition, by that he gives of the epic poem.

'The Epopiëa, according to him, is a diſ-'courſe invented by art, to form the manners 'by ſuch inſtructions as are diſguiſed under the 'allegories of ſome important action which is 'related in verſe, after a probable, entertain-'ing, and ſurpriſing manner *.'

Now what man, not knowing the nature of an epic poem, would form any diſtinct or ſatisfactory idea from this definition? or who, allowing him to admit it as ſatisfactory, would have reſolution enough to undertake to demonſtrate, upon any one epic poem, what is invented by art? is it art that invents? it diſpoſes indeed, what has been already invented. Or what is the meaning of relating in a probable manner; does this relate to the things or the ſtyle? the manner properly belongs to the ſtyle, the probability to the things. And how are we to apply the word entertaining, joined to the other word ſurpriſing?

* Un diſcours inventé avec art pour former les moeurs par des inſtructions déguiſées ſous les allegories d'une actione importante, qui eſt racontée en vers d'une maniere vraiſemblable, divertiſſante & merveilleuſe. Traité de L'Epique, Livre I. chap. 3.

do

do theſe epithets belong only to the manner, the form of the narration? but what a tediouſneſs! what a circumlocution! in ſhort, this definition is neither conciſe, clear, nor applicable to every kind of epic. Is it made only for Homer or Virgil, if it is for them? for that is a queſtion far from being decided, and not eaſily rendered ſolvable.

Our definition affords a preciſe idea; as ſoon as the terms are underſtood they may be applied equally to every epic poem.

CHAP. IX.

The perſonages or actors in the epic.

IT may be aſked what number of actors there ſhould be in an epic poem, and what ſhould be their qualifications.

The number is determined by the exigence of the action and by the rules of probability. No more nor no leſs ſhould be employed, than what are abſolutely neceſſary for the principal perſonage to attain his end.

The action of an epic poem is the action of one man, or of many, or ſometimes of a whole nation or people.

In the action of a people, there may be one in particular, who appears the principal and chief actor, or *Coryphæus*: ſuch were Scipio and Hannibal in the ſecond Punic war. The

action of a ſingle perſon may intereſt a whole nation, as Cæſar's enterpriſe againſt the republic of Rome.

In general a work will be found more intereſting where there is the action of one ſingle perſon only, than when a whole people are acting; becauſe the reader, as being a private man himſelf, brings every circumſtance home.

By the ſame reaſon the action of a ſingle man, which holds the fate of a whole nation in ſuſpence, muſt be much more affecting than that of a whole people, in which one ſingle perſon is the ſole inſtrument. Thus Achilles, whoſe anger decides the fate of the Greeks, intereſts the private reader more nearly than the eſtabliſhment of the Trojan war in Italy, by a Trojan. Hence it may be inferred, that the epic action will in itſelf be more affecting, if it is the action or enterpriſe of one ſingle perſon.

CHAP. X.

The qualifications of the epic perſonages.

THE qualifications of the perſons conſiſt in the character and manners aſſigned them. Though we might perhaps very ſafely confound theſe two, as the manners are commonly founded on the character, and the character included in the manners; yet I think that by the word character we are to underſtand a natural diſpoſition, which determines the party to act

one

one way preferable to another; and that manners ſhould rather ſignify a diſpoſition acquired by a repetition of certain acts, to which we are inclined either by nature or education, example or reaſon. Socrates was born with a violent and impetuous character; yet nothing could be more mild and ſoft than his manners. Manners may be taken up or quitted, through contrary habitudes: but a character can neither be acquired nor left off; the utmoſt we can do is to regulate, ſoften, reſtrain, conceal, or diſguiſe it.

There is a character proper to every degree of age from infancy to the moſt advanced years; to all conditions, as the king, the magiſtrate, and the general: there are others proper to particular families, ſuch as goodneſs, pride, generoſity, avarice, &c.

Commonly ſpeaking the character and the manners go together. For where is that ſoul poſſeſſed of ſufficient fortitude to eſtabliſh and maintain, by its own power, a character of choice and will, in oppoſition to that originally given it by nature?

The following is the uſual order in which the principles and their effects appear in the conduct of mankind, when left to nature.

The character determines the manners; theſe joined to the character determine the will in preſence of the object. The will determined, produces the outward and ſenſible act. For inſtance;

ſtance, a man is born naturally humane and compaſſionate; this is his character; education ſtrengthens this diſpoſition, and accuſtoms him to do acts of humanity and goodneſs: theſe are his manners. An occaſion preſents of aſſiſting a perſon in diſtreſs; he reſolves to aſſiſt him; this is his will; the interior or inward act: laſtly, he carries it into execution; he aſſiſts him; this is the outward or ſenſible act. This chain is very eaſily conceived and followed.

But the character, the manners, the interior will, have no other way of diſcovering themſelves than by actions and ſpeech, which are the images of the ſoul, whether in its habits or actual ſentiments: *Mihi quale ingenium haberes indicii fuit oratio.* Thus every poem has its manners, when the diſcourſe or action of the perſon who ſpeaks or acts, bears the ſenſible marks of his real character, ſentiments, and diſpoſition. By ſenſible marks I mean a lively and expreſſive manner, that ſtrikes us at once, and not in an equivocal or obſcure way. This is what Horace means, when he ſays, *Notandi ſunt tibi mores*; Mark well the manners *.

So that as the heart of man is traced in his actions and diſcourſe, and that theſe ſhould

* Hor. de Art Poet.

always have one and the ſame meaning; the manners may be ſaid to be well marked; well diſtinguiſhed, when, by what the perſon ſays, we are enabled to form a judgment of what he muſt naturally do and ſay hereafter, by what he has already done. The wrath of Juno is painted in her diſcourſe at the beginning of the Æneid; therefore has manners. Examine Racine's Phædra, in the fourth ſcene of the act *, and you will find her language and her every motion the exact image of what ſhe ſuffers in her ſoul. Hear Pulcheria in Corneille, or Mr. Addiſon's Cato in his noble Soliloquy, what character! what force! what truth of manners appear in both!

The manners ſhould be proper.

The poetical propriety of manners conſiſts in the conformity of the ſpeech and actions of the perſon with the opinion conceived of him: thus, let Nero ſhew himſelf cruel, Tiberius ſuſpicious, Sino deceitful, Mezentius impious, and Satan a blaſphemer, and the manners will be proper.

And generally ſpeaking it is but a moderate merit in a poem that its perſonages are virtuous.

* Or in Mr. Smith's Phædra and Hypolitus, See note to page 73. vol. 3.

Poetry conſiders not that as an object. Virgil indeed has made his hero a man every way perfect; he is pious towards the gods and his parents, affectionate to his wife, whom he returns to ſeek amidſt the flames and horrors of a town given up to the enemy; tender to his ſon, for whom he does ſuch wonders; he is gracious and good, not only to his companions, whom he endeavours, by every means in his power to make happy; but even to his enemies, whom he would willingly preſerve to a man. He is a brave warrior, a wiſe legiſlator, a good father, a good king, and a good maſter. But after all, this man is rather a prodigy than a man, and this portrait of him ſeems drawn merely to flatter the imagination. We admire him, but then it is in that cold, languid manner, that we do things at a great diſtance from us. Could not Homer, had he been ſo inclined, have united in one hero the prudence of Neſtor, the learning of Ulyſſes, the majeſty of Agamemnon, and the valor of Achilles? but in doing only what was proper, he has perhaps done much better than Virgil. His hero is young, and at the ſame time, the moſt ſtout and valiant of any in the army; he is ſo beautiful, that when diſguiſed in the dreſs, and mingling in the company of a ſet of young princeſſes, even Ulyſſes, with all his cunning and penetration, ſtood in need of a ſtratagem to diſcover him; a circumſtance which

renders

renders his character for virtue ſtill more moving. He has a heart naturally noble and good, he loves the people, feels the power of friendſhip, and reſpects the gods; but with this amiable diſpoſition, with all theſe heroic qualities, he is impetuous and choleric; and his fury tranſports him beyond all bounds: he is ſometimes evidently in the wrong, and yet, ſuch as he is, we admire, we love him; and certainly we ſhould love him leſs were he more perfect, becauſe then his character would not appear ſo natural, ſo like the truth, but have more the air of fiction and invention. His manners are not in the moral which he delivers, or of which he is the model, but in his own proper actions and diſcourſe, which every-where clearly bear the marks of the character aſſigned him.

But how ſhall we be able to judge if the diſcourſe and actions are ſuitable to the characters, unleſs we know before-hand the character or manners themſelves?

Doubtleſs theſe muſt be firſt known; to judge of the likeneſs of a portrait we muſt firſt have ſeen the original.

Now, the characters of heroes are to be known either from hiſtory, fable, or fame; and they are to be repreſented in poetry agreeable to the idea we have of them. Thus Medea ſhould be cruel, Io plaintive, Ixion perfidious, Achilles ſuch as we have juſt deſcribed him, &c.

But ſuppoſe it is a character entirely new; as that of a Zara, which is not to be found in any fable or hiſtory, and of which we can conſequently form no kind of idea? then we muſt eſtabliſh the character at once in the firſt ſcenes, and keep to it through the whole of the piece, and then the manners will have that propriety which we have deſcribed. See volume third, Expoſition of Horace's Art of Poetry.

The manners ſhould be equally preſerved.

The ſecond qualification, which is indeed included in the firſt, is, that the manners be uniformly preſerved, that is to ſay, they ſhould be every-where the ſame; and not with the head of a beautiful woman, and the tail of a monſtrous fiſh. We are never to tranſgreſs this rule, unleſs when we would deſcribe inconſtancy and caprice itſelf.

They ſhould be varied or contraſted.

The third qualification is, that the manners ſhould be varied or contraſted in the different perſonages, the better to aſſiſt and ſet off each other. There are three ways in which the manners may be varied, viz. when being of the ſame kind they vary only in degree: thus, Ajax, Diomedes, Achilles, and Neſtor, are all of them valiant, but then they are ſo in different degrees. 2. By the addition

of

of ſome other qualification, which, without being predominant, ſtill alters the kind: Ajax is more fierce, Diomedes more brave, Achilles more hot and violent, and Neſtor more humane; and yet the predominant quality in every one of theſe is valor. Priam and Neſtor are both of them wiſe and prudent; but the firſt is cautious and fearful, the other more collected and bold. 3. Laſtly, the manners may be contraſted even by the difference of kind. Mitio in Terence knows no bounds to his generoſity; Demea cannot be prevailed upon to part with a ſingle obolus. Here one character ſets the other off finely. Theſe are the moſt eaſy of any to be obſerved; they have at firſt all the luſtre of a brilliant antitheſis, but they quickly experience the fate of all thoſe things that have too much glare, they do not affect us ſo ſtrongly as others; becauſe art appears too plainly, and the mind, knowing one ſide of the object, can already figure to itſelf what is to be ſeen on the other.

We have already obſerved, that it is by the actions and diſcourſe that the manners are to be properly eſtabliſhed and diſtinguiſhed. Nothing ſo much betrays the want of genius and invention in a writer, as giving us in his own words the portrait of the perſon whoſe manners he would deſcribe: the perſons will be either well or ill characteriſed by his conduct; if well, what need is there for an inſcription? does a good painter

painter write the names of his figures underneath them, this is a horſe, a rack, a houſe, &c. But if the piece does not characteriſe itſelf, he had better deſtroy his pencil and throw away his colors: nor gods nor men admit of middling poets. Has Virgil drawn the character of Dido, Æneas, or Turnus, any where in his work? no, it appears in every part of their conduct. The piety of Æneas is ſeen in the very beginning of the poem as well as his character of goodneſs and humanity.

The paſſion of Dido ſhews itſelf upon firſt ſeeing Æneas, and ſo of the reſt. Menedemus in Terence, the Man-hater in Moliere, and the Falſtaff of Shakeſpear, ſtand in no need of the poet's pencil, they ſpeak themſelves: and the original is certainly more valuable than the picture. I know that ſome dramatic authors are accuſtomed to ſketch out the character of the principal perſon in the firſt ſcenes; but this is only in comedy, it is ſeldom done in tragedy and neither Homer nor Virgil ever did it in the epic; however this ſketch is but a ſketch, that is to ſay, it only contains the rude out-lines of the piece; the reſt is left to the diſcernment of the ſpectator, and theſe are only hints given him occaſionally and tranſiently. The writer does not ſtop on purpoſe to deſcribe his man in a ſet formal manner.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

Of the form of an epic poem.

ALL that we have to ſay on this head is reducible to the explanation of the two firſt terms of our definition: viz. an epic poem is a poetical narration.

We have elſewhere defined the word narration *: it is a clear account of a thing which has happened. Its eſſential qualifications are conciſeneſs, peculiarity, probability. Its ornaments conſiſt in thoughts, expreſſions, turns, alluſions, allegories, and ſuch other things as are chiefly included in the word poetical, which we ſhall ſubſequently explain more at large.

The propoſition and invocation.

Before the epic narration begins there is what is called the propoſition of the ſubject, and next the invocation.

Nature and good ſenſe require that every author, when he enters upon his ſubject, ſhould declare what it is. Homer begins thus: I ſing the deadly wrath of Peleus's ſon. Virgil, Arms and the man I ſing, &c. † Deſpreaux.

Je

* Volume I.

† ——Milton has propoſed the ſubject of his poem in the following verſes:

Of

Je chante les combats & ce prelat terrible,
Qui par ſes longs travaux & ſa force invincible,
Dans un illuſtre Egliſe exerçant ſon grand coeur
Fit à la fin placer un lutrin dans le choeur.

BOIL. Lutrin, Canto 1.

Arms, and the prieſt I ſing, whoſe martial ſoul
No toil could terrify, no fear controul,
'Till by long labor, to his heart's deſire,
He ſaw the deſk refloriſh in the choir.

We have already explained what is the reaſon of the propoſition and the effect it is to produce: it is this which properly produces what we call unity in the action.

Of man's firſt diſobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whoſe mortal taſte
Brought death into the world and all our woe,
With loſs of Eden, 'till one greater man
Reſtore us, and regain the bliſsful ſeat;
Sing heav'nly muſe.——————

Theſe lines are perhaps as plain, ſimple, and unadorned, as any of the whole poem, in which particular the author has conformed himſelf to the example of Homer and Virgil, and the precept of Horace.

His invocation to a work which turns in a great meaſure upon the creation of the world, is very properly made to the muſe who inſpired Moſes in thoſe books from whence the poet drew his ſubject, and to the holy ſpirit who is therein repreſented as operating after a particular manner in the firſt production of nature. This whole exordium, which takes up 27 verſes, beginning from the 5th, riſes very happily into noble language and ſentiment.

Addiſon Spect. No. 303.

After

After the propoſition the poet invokes ſome divinity, who may reveal to him the ſupernatural cauſes of the event he is about to relate. As a mortal, he cannot be ſuppoſed to know what paſſed in the council of the gods relative to the ſettling of Æneas in Italy: he therefore ſupplicates the muſes to inſtruct him. Muſe tell the cauſe. 'Muſa mihi cauſas memora.' Boileau thus calls upon his muſe.

Muſe redis moi donc quelle ardeur de vengeance
De ces hommes ſacrés rompit l'intelligence,
Et troubla ſi long temps deux celebres rivaux,
Tant de fiel entre-t-il dans l'ame des devots? *Ibid.*

Muſe, let the holy warrior's rage be ſung;
Why ſacred minds infernal furies ſtung;
What ſparks inflam'd the zealous rival's heat,
And in religious ſouls ſuch rancour did create.

The poet now, ſuppoſing his prayer heard, begins in a ſublime and almoſt prophetic ſtrain.

Vix, è conſpectu Siculæ telluris, in altum
Vela dabant læti, & ſpumas ſalis ære ruebant;
Cùm Juno,———— Virgil's Æn. B. I.

Now ſcarce the Trojan fleet with ſails and oars,
Had left behind the fair Sicilian ſhores:
When lab'ring ſtill with endleſs diſcontent.
The Queen of Heaven———— DRYD.

Boileau and Dr. Garth ſet off in the ſame lofty manner, though their ſubjects are both of them of the burleſque kind. Parmi

Parmi les doux plaiſirs d'une paix fraternelle,
Paris voyoit fleurir ſon antique chapelle;
Ses chanoines verneils & brillans de ſanté,
S'engraiſſoient d'une longue et ſainte oiſiveté;
Sans ſortir de leurs lits plus doux que leurs hermines
Ces pieux fainéans faiſoient chanter matines;
Veilloient à bien diner, & laiſſoient en leur lieu
A des Chantres gagés; le ſoin de prier Dieu:
Quand la Diſcorde, &c.———

'Midſt the ſoft pleaſures of fraternal peace,
In laughing plenty and luxurious eaſe;
Paris beheld her ancient chapel riſe,
Florid in years, delightful to her eyes.
Her luſty canons roſy beauties grace,
And brilliant health crimſons each ruddy face;
Deep ſunk in down, ſoft as their furs they lie,
Fatten'd with tedious holy luxury.
While there the ſacred ſluggards waſte the day,
In dull repoſe, by deputy they pray;
They only watch'd that they might reliſh reſt,
And never faſted but to make a feaſt.
Unhealthy mattins wiſely they decline,
And ſubſtitute a journeyman-divine.
When diſcord roſe———

Not far from that moſt celebrated place
Where angry Juſtice ſhews her awful face,
Where little villains muſt ſubmit to fate,
That great ones may enjoy the world in ſtate.
There ſtands a dome, &c.

GARTH's Diſpenſary, Canto 1.

The

The propoſition ſhould be ſimple, clear, and void of pomp and apparatus. This we are taught both by Horace and Boileau.

Nec ſic incipies ut ſcriptor cyclicus olim, &c.
HOR. Ar. Poet:

N'allez point dés l'abord ſur Pegaſe monté
Crier à vos lecteurs d'une voix de tonnerre
Je chante le vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre.
BOIL. Art Poet.

Mount not too ſoon upon a fiery ſteed:
Nor tell your reader, in a thund'ring verſe,
'The conqueror of conquerors I rehearſe.'

The invocation may be in a very elevated and ſublime ſtile: it is an addreſs to the Deity; and conſequently admits of great warmth, energy, and dignity.

But let us explain the ſignification of the word poetical. What is narration, that which is poetical?

What is meant by a poetical narration.

Some things are beſt known and defined by their contraries. What is an hiſtorical narrative? it is a faithful relation of the truth, delivered in proſe, that is, in the moſt natural and even ſtile. The poetical narration is juſt the reverſe; it is a relation of falſhoods and fictions, delivered in an artificial language, that is, with all the apparatus of art and illuſion. So that, as in hiſtory, the things are all true, the order natural,

natural, the ſtile plain and ſimple, and the expreſſions void of any apparent art or deſign. On the contrary, in the poetical narration, there is one continued artifice in the things, recital, ſtile, and verſification.

In a poem of the epic kind the things, as they are called, are the action, with all its parts great and ſmall, eſſential and integral, neceſſary and ornamental; all which Genius produces with the freedom of a creative god. *Ingenium cui divinius.* We have already ſhewn what the epic action is; how to chuſe its parts; in what manner to prepare them, and to adjuſt them with each other; and have likewiſe pointed out the manner in which Genius produces them. We ſhall here only give an example of the proceſs.

Genius perceives at firſt ſight, and in general, whether the ſubject propoſed has wherewithal to furniſh ſufficient matter for ſuch or ſuch kind of poem. It lays hold of the trunk in the firſt diviſions of the branches, and from thence, by degrees, deſcends to the minuteſt twigs. It conſiders the perſons; and what may be added or retrenched; what is ſuperfluous or wanting; whether the characters play well together; if they mutually ſet off, contraſt, or produce each other. It cooly deliberates on, and compares the means with their end; which it ſo juſtly diſpoſes under one another, that they commutually

mutually aſſiſt in arriving at the main end. Laſtly, when it has ſeen the limits and form of the ground, and has deſigned the plan and elevation of the ſuperſtructure, it begins to prepare its colors and handle the pencil.

Let us give a man of genius, as the ſubject of an epic poem, a deſk to be replaced on the bench it had been removed from. Here is certainly wherewithal to exerciſe his talent; the ſubject appears poor, dry, and barren.

The action is given in the ſubject itſelf; 'a deſk to be replaced.'

He muſt create actors or perſonages, he muſt furniſh theſe with motives for their actions, and means to attain their end. A jealouſy ariſes between two canons who are deſirous of eclipſing each other in the choir. Diſcord, an allegorical deity, enraged to ſee a peaceful calm reign in a temple ſo near to that where ſhe is worſhipped by the lawyers, breaths her fires into the hearts of theſe two rivals. This is the motive and main ſpring of the action; the effects are as follow: the two canons counteract each other; they make uſe of ſuch means as the goddeſs Diſcord ſuggeſts to them, and the deſk is replaced upon its ſtand in the night-time. The ſight of this object the next morning violently incenſes the oppoſite party: they hold a council upon it, and a combat enſues: the two deities, Piety and Juſtice interfere to terminate

the

the difference. This is the method of operation obſerved by Genius with regard to the principal parts.

It now continues its work upon the leſſer parts; it invents characters for the prelate, for Evrard, Gilotin, Brontin, and Boirude; from theſe characters Genius draws ſuch thoughts as are ſuitable to the ſubject which puts the perſons in action. It forms epiſodes, as that of the loves of the barber's wife, the palace of Sloth, the temple of Chicane, &c. Genius has now fully acquitted itſelf of its office; it has prepared all the cauſes and produced all the events.

But from what ſource has it drawn all this? from nature; from thence it has taken all the parts of which its work is compoſed; and even the model of their combinations in forming a regular whole.

But what are we to underſtand by the word nature? it is, 1. Whatever actually exiſts in the univerſe. 2. Whatever has exiſted before ourſelves, and is to be learnt from the hiſtory of times, places, and perſons. 3. Whatever may exiſt, but perhaps never yet has, nor will exiſt. In hiſtory we include fable and all kinds of poetical inventions; theſe we allow a ſuppoſed exiſtence, which is the ſame thing to the actions as hiſtorical reality. So that there are three different worlds, through which a poetical genius may range to make a choice, and ſelect ſuch things

things as it judges moſt convenient to form its compoſitions, viz. the real world; the hiſtorical world, which likewiſe includes the fabulous; and the poſſible or ſuppoſable world.

It is a great miſtake to imagine that poetry has no other where to ſearch for matter than in the world of fictions and poſſibilities. It is true that ſhe alone poſſeſſes this privilege; but that does not infer that ſhe may not, or even ought not, to make the moſt advantage of whatever has, or has had reality, and turn it to her own profit.

The mind of man takes pleaſure only in ſuch things as it recollects, and it cannot be ſuppoſed to recollect any thing without having firſt ſeen and known it. Now is it much eaſier to recollect what one has ſeen in the world we live in, or from hiſtory, than thoſe beings which are wholly imaginary, and have at moſt but ſome faint analogous features, or very diſtant and uncertain reſemblance of thoſe real beings whoſe exiſtence and properties we already know.

A ſkilful poet who is maſter of his art, one who knows the true ſources from whence he is to derive his materials, will never be at the labor and pains to confine himſelf to creating rational beings. No, he will take his matter whereſoever he finds it, in the things which actually and preſently exiſt, or in the hiſtory of paſt ages; or in the ideas and common received opi-

nions of mankind. And if in virtue of his privilege of creation and invention he ſometimes makes alterations in theſe, he has always his model by him, to ſerve as a guide; the principal ſtrokes of which he transfers from time to time to his own poetical picture. He ſeems to preſent things that are new; but it is all a deception of art, which impoſes upon us, and makes us believe that we have learnt ſomething of the poet, which we were ignorant of before. For when in reading a piece, we cry, that's juſt, that's true; what is this but ſaying in other words, this agrees with the idea I had formed of this object? I know it again in the portrait drawn of it by art. Had Homer and Virgil left us the hiſtory of their own thoughts, we ſhould have found them buſied rather in employing the materials already in their hands, than in making new ones. They were well apprized that there is that lively and ſtriking character reſulting from reality, which is next to an impoſſibility to give to things merely fictitious. Horace tells us, *Difficile eſt propriè communia dicerè.*

A poet may be allowed to embelliſh the truth, to give it as much the air of novelty as poſſible, by the help of every grace and ornament in the power of his art, and to diſpoſe and blend the ſeveral parts according to his own fancy; but let the

the foundation be always apparent, and if poſſible, have really exiſted.

The buſineſs of the genius there is not to create*; it is firſt of all to form a plan, then to ſeek for, and diſcover materials to fill it. Laſtly, to know how to reduce theſe materials, furniſhed by nature, to the artificial plan it has formed. In this reſpect, Homer and Virgil have ſhewn a genius ſuperior to that of all other poets; and here it is that we ſhould endeavour to imitate them.

Let us now ſee what is the art made uſe of by poets in their narrations.

The art made uſe of by poets in their narrations.

Poetry obſerves a very different order in its narrations from that of hiſtory, which ſcrupulouſly conforms itſelf to the order preſcribed by nature: the cauſes are ſet to work, the action is performed, it is compleated: every thing proceeds in an even and uninterrupted manner.

In poetry, the author often throws himſelf at once into the midſt of the events, as if the reader was already perfectly acquainted with all the preceding circumſtances; and this particularly in enterpriſes of long duration.

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* See vol. 1. §. 1.

Ordinis hæc virtus erit & venus, aut ego fallor
Ut jam nunc dicat, jam nunc debentia dici
Pleraque differat, & præſens in tempus omittat.
HOR. ART. POET.

In this, or I miſtake, conſiſts the grace
And force of method; to aſſign a place
For what with preſent judgment ſhould be ſaid,
And for ſome happier time the reſt delay'd *.
FRANCIS.

The narration begins very near the end of the action, and means are found to defer the expoſition of the cauſes to ſome favorable opportunity that the poet will find. Thus Æneas ſets out at once from Sicily, and is juſt upon landing in Italy, when a tempeſt caſts him upon the coaſt of Carthage, where he meets with the Queen Dido, who is deſirous of knowing his misfortunes and adventures; he relates them to her; and by this means the poet has an opportunity of acquainting his reader with what happened to him, previous to his departure from Sicily. This is the art made uſe of by poets in their arrangment and diſpoſition of the ſeveral parts.

They have alſo an art peculiar to the form of their ſtile; which is that of giving a dramatic air or turn to moſt of their narrations.

To explain this clearly, it will be neceſſary to ſhew the different forms that poetry may take in its manner of relating.

* In Milton the tranſition from the exordium to the fable is exquiſitely beautiful and natural.

Ari-

Ariſtotle tells us, there are three forms which poetry may take. In the firſt the poet does not appear at all himſelf, but only thoſe whom he cauſes to act. Thus Corneille and Shakeſpear never appear themſelves in any of their plays, but only the perſons whom they make ſpeak.

The ſecond form is that wherein the poet appears himſelf, and does not ſhew his perſons, i. e. he ſpeaks in his own perſon, and relates what his perſons have done: thus La Fontaine does not ſhew us the mountain in labor, nor Gay the court of Death; they only tell us what was ſaid and done on the occaſion.

The third is of a mixed nature, wherein, without telling, the perſons appear, their diſcourſe is related as coming from themſelves, by putting it into their own mouths, which makes it of the dramatic kind.

Nothing could be more heavy and monſtrous than a narration, if always in one form. No hiſtorian, however ſtrictly confined to truth, but has thought it neceſſary at times to be ſomewhat unfaithful to vary his form, and throw a little of that dramatic we have been ſpeaking of into ſome parts of his narration. A much ſtronger reaſon has the epic muſe to make uſe of this licence, becauſe her avowed end is to pleaſe, and ſhe takes without diſguiſe every means ſhe can find to attain that end.

Ariſtotle obſerves that Homer is particularly admirable in this point: his poems are a continued ſeries of diſcourſe. The poet himſelf ſcarce ever ſpeaks, but to tell us this or that hero ſpoke thus, or thus replied another. By this method he places us in the midſt of thoſe who are ſpeaking; we hear them, nay, we in a manner ſee them; for they live in their ſpeeches; whereas, in a narration, they are dead; or at leaſt are at ſuch a diſtance from us, that we hardly hear them. Virgil might have ſaid, 'Juno complained bitterly within herſelf, that ſhe could 'not have her revenge upon the Trojans. She 'compared herſelf, who was the ſiſter and wife 'of Jupiter, with Pallas, who had been able to 'inflict a glorious vengeance on the ſon of 'Oïleus, both by her own hands, and with the 'bolts of Jove himſelf.' This is the form of an epic narration.

Let us now approach nearer to the dramatic, and put this into a kind of indirect diſcourſe. Juno, ſeeing the fleet of Æneas under full ſail, cried out, 'ſhe was at laſt overcome; that it 'would be impoſſible for her to prevent the 'Teucrian chief from entering Italy; that Pallas 'had the ſatisfaction of burning the Argive fleet 'to revenge herſelf on one ſingle offender, &c.' Here is a narration, one half of which is dramatical. Juno does not ſpeak herſelf, it is the hiſtorian; but he repeats the words uſed by

Juno

June on the occaſion? now let us hear the goddeſs herſelf. Thus ſhe begins:

Mene incepto deſiſtere victam,
Nec poſſe Italiâ Teucrorum avertere regem? &c.

Then am I vanquiſh'd, muſt I yield; ſaid ſhe;
And muſt the Trojans reign in Italy?
So fate will have it.
Could angry Pallas, with revengeful ſpleen,
The Græcian navy burn, and drown the men?
She, for the fault of one offending foe,
The bolts of Jove himſelf preſum'd to throw.—
But I, who walk in awful ſtate above
The majeſty of heav'n, the ſiſter-wife of Jove, &c.

Here is the dramatic, ſuch as it may or ought to enter into the epic.

We will now deſcend to more minute particulars. It is in theſe only that we meet with inſtruction: there the great artiſt appears in his brighteſt luſtre. The ſame colors may be uſed by every painter; but yet, an indifferent hand will never be able to draw the copy of a fine original ſo well in the manner that a Rubens or a Raphael would have painted one from a middling picture. There will be the ſame deſign, the ſame colors in both originals, and their copies; but the copy of the good piece, done by a middling painter, will not be equal to his original; and the copy of the middling one, done by the great painter, will much exceed it. And

the reaſon of this? the touch of the artiſt beſtows a certain degree of perfections which is not viſible in the parts when divided, but is very ſenſible and ſtriking in the whole. Let the plan of the Lutrin or Diſpenſary be given to an indifferent poet, with all the leſſer parts exactly ſketched out to his hand; yet we muſt not imagine, that with all theſe helps he will be able to make that of it, that either Boileau or Garth have done. Nay, give him even the expreſſions, and he ſhall diſpoſe them in ſuch a manner, as will ſpoil and deface the beauty of every thought. He will not, like either of the abovenamed authors, be ſenſible of the power of a word properly placed, and for want of a juſt conſtruction, and artful connection, the ſenſe will be intirely marred or unintelligible; the fire will be faint, and conſequently the deſcriptions will fall ſhort of their force. Such would be the fate of theſe ſubjects in the hands of an indifferent artiſt. Let us now ſee in what manner a real poet has acquitted himſelf herein, viz. Deſpreax.

1. He has employed no thoughts but what are true, juſt, and natural; and follow, beget, and bear on each other with an uninterrupted ſucceſſion, like that of waves. Here is one of his deſcriptions; which is doubtleſs the dulleſt part of any work of genius.

Dans

Dans le reduit obſcur d'une alcove enfoncée,
S'éléve un lit de plume à grands fraix amaſſée.
Quatre rideaux pompeux, par un double contour,
En défendent l'entrée à la clarté du jour.
Là, parmi les douceurs d'un tranquile ſilence,
Regne ſur le duvet une heureuſe indolence.
C'eſt la que là Prelat, muni d'un déjeuner,
Dormant d'un leger ſomme, attendoit le diner.
La jeuneſſe en ſa fleur brille ſur ſon viſage.
Son menton ſur ſon ſein deſcend à double étage.
Et ſon cops ramaſſé dans ſa courte groſſeur,
Fait gémir les couſſins ſous ſa molle épaiſſeur,

Deep in the covert of a dark alcove,
Form'd for the idle gods of ſleep and love,
A downy couch appears, with wondrous care
And great expence, ſecur'd from noxious air.
Curtains in double folds around it run,
And bar all entrance to th' intruding ſun:
Artfully rais'd to lull each ſofter ſenſe
Devoted to the goddeſs indolence.
There negligently dreaming out the day,
Diſſolv'd in ſleep the holy ſluggard lay;
Strengthen'd with an immoderate morning meal,
The glutton batten'd till the dinner bell.
Youth in its flow'ry bloom, with verdant grace,
Shone in his eyes and brighten'd on his face:
His chin enormous overſpreads his cheſt,
In three deep folds deſcending on his breaſt.
There doz'd the leaden lump of ſlumb'ring fat,
While the preſs'd cuſhions groan'd beneath his weight.

Dionyſius of Halycarnaſſus has this rule for judging of well made verſe, viz. that every thing ſhould be as connected, flowing, juſt, and compact, as in proſe. Now, what writer, allowing him all the liberty of proſe, could flatter himſelf with doing it in a more natural, pictureſque manner?

2. His words are admirably well choſen to expreſs his meaning. *Reduit* (covert) paints a retired, lonely, and cloſe place. *Obſcur* (dark) this was neceſſary to have out his nap till broad day-light. *Une alcove enfoncée*, that is, a deep retreat, the retreat of ſleep and indolence itſelf. *S'éléve* (riſes, bounds up) at the beginning of the verſe, gives us a fine idea of a light gently-ſwelled of down. *A grands fraix amaſſée* (at great expence) how fine this down! what time and expence muſt it have coſt to make a body which ſhould ſwell and riſe with ſo much ſoftneſs! but all is not yet done to render the prelate's repoſe fully complete. *Quatre rideaux* (curtains in double folds) which croſs each other, and are ſuppoſed to be of the largeſt, thickeſt kind, which could be got. *Pompeux* is placed at the end of the hemſtich, as a pauſe for the ear and attention, and to make a fuller impreſſion on them. *Défendent l'entrée* (and barr'd all entrance) what haughtineſs! forbids the entrance of day, leſt it ſhould interrupt, by its brightneſs, the pre-

cious

cious ſlumber of the prelate. *Là, parmi les douceurs d'un tranquile ſilence.*

There negligently dreaming out the day,
Diſſolv'd in ſleep the holy ſluggard lay.

Nothing can be more ſoft, more lulling than this line, and its rhyme with the following, which is equally beautiful, is moſt delightfully languiſhing; *Regne ſur le duvet une heureuſe indolence.* This is not only the picture of an indolent man, but that of indolence itſelf; and that happy kind of indolence too, which reigns amidſt the uninterrupted fruition of every happineſs that can be ſuppoſed allied to regal power. This analyſis will ſuffice to ſhew the juſtneſs and pictureſque energy of the words.

3. There are turns of expreſſion which are remarkably ſimple and ſtrong at the ſame time. Not to multiply examples, what can be more conciſe than this connection? *Là, parmi les douceurs*; and two verſes afterwards, the diſpoſition of the words, *C'eſt là que le prelat*, ſhew us at once the prelate and the place he is in.

4. He deſcribes the minuteſt circumſtances; ſo that by diſcovering to us all the ſeveral parts of certain objects, thoſe objects themſelves ſeem to be multiplied, and to preſs upon and chace each other.

5. His verſe has a natural harmony: this conſiſts, as we have elſewhere ſhewn, in the judi-

cious choice and combination of particular ſounds, ſuitable to the nature of the object to be expreſſed. The verſes already cited are inſtances of this.

6. The number and diſtribution of the pauſes are admirably adapted to the relief of the voice and ear.

In fine, there is an artificial harmony of verſe; and this has rules partly from taſte, and partly from art.

Thoſe of taſte conſiſt (in French) in the choice of ſounds, eſpecially thoſe of the pauſes and finals, and which ſhould be rough or ſmooth, ſprightly or heavy, lively or flat, rich or poor, according to the object; in the choice of ſyllables that are long or ſhort, very long or very ſhort, and in the proper placing of theſe. For example, in this line, *regne ſur le duvet*; it is proper that the firſt ſyllable of *regne* ſhould belong, and that in the latter part of the ſame line, *dune heureuſe indolence*, *heureuſe* ſhould make two long ſyllables; and that *in-do-lence* ſhould have one ſhort between two long; the ſecond of which ſhould be much longer than the firſt. The ſame may be ſaid of the word *s'éléve*; the firſt ſyllable is very ſhort, the ſecond, which is long, ſeems to riſe above it: and in the word *enfoncée*, the laſt ſyllable ſeems to ſink away or fall off in the pronunciation.

Perhaps

Perhaps this may appear too tedious a detail; but as the author certainly intended theſe beauties to be remarked and felt, why ſhould not the reader obſerve them? we find the verſe reads much better in this manner, than it would in any other; and it does ſo for the reaſons above given. This is what we have called the painter's touch; for which indeed there can be no ſettled rules of art: but when this beauty is met with in any work, art ſhould at leaſt remark it, and endeavour to make others obſerve it, who deſire to be acquainted with it. Indeed, it is by this that Homer and Virgil are what they are: it is this that conſtitutes the ſpirit and beauty of poetry; and conſequently no detail can be too minute, that tends to inſtruct us therein.

The rules which art preſcribes to artificial harmony, conſiſt in the choice of the ſpecies of verſe to be employed. Each kind has its peculiar ſpecies: that of the epic is the heroic, which, with the Greeks, Latins, and us (the French) conſiſts of verſes of twelve ſyllables *, with a pauſe in the middle, and a ſenſible cadence on the final. This ſpecies of verſe makes no difference, but when joined to ſuch or ſuch ſtyle, and when it has ſuch or ſuch numbers. The hexameter verſe of the Latins is proper for the epiſtolary ſtile, the ſame as the Alexandrine

* Such verſe once obtained in the Engliſh language.

with

with us. The verſe therefore requires to be raiſed according to the particular ſtile of which it is the meaſure.

Now there are three kinds of ſtile, the ſimple, the middling, and the ſublime or lofty ſtyle; and theſe have each their ſeveral degrees, which it is very hard to diſtinguiſh; becauſe, before we can form any idea of them, eſpecially the latter, it is neceſſary to have ſeen ſome examples. In this kind, as indeed in many others, we can form our ideas upon the authority of thoſe models offered us in the works of great authors. The Greeks knew no ſublimer ſtile than that of Homer and Pindar. The Latins had Virgil and Horace. Corneille in tragedy, and Rouſſean in his ſpiritual odes, might be our ſtandards *, had we not happily the knowledge of the pſalms of David, the book of Job, and the ſong of the prophets, which is the higheſt degree of poetry we are at preſent acquainted with. Whatever ſhould exceed theſe would not be made for us, becauſe we ſhould want a rule for to judge of it by; and it would appear *outré*, and an extravagant and monſtrous performance.

* To which we may with great juſtice add our own countrymen Shakeſpear and Otway for the former, and Mr. Addiſon and Pope for the latter kind of writing; the one, in his hymn on the glories of the creation from the 19th pſalm, quoted in the 3d vol. of this work under the article of the ode, and the other in his Meſſiah, a piece that will be the admiration of every perſon of taſte while the Engliſh language remains in its purity.

What

What then is the proper degree of elevation for the epic? this depends on the dignity of its perſons. If it is a muſe that inſpires, and a deity that ſpeaks, then the ſtile, though it ſhould be ſomething more than human, yet, as ſpeaking to men, it ſhould be rendered intelligible to human capacity; but how can it do this? The muſe then muſt borrow the language of men and make uſe of their terms; but, at the ſame time, uſe all poſſible means of heightening this language, and raiſing it above itſelf without deſtroying it. For this purpoſe ſhe muſt revive old words, Sic *fatur* lacrymans; employ metaphors, Claſſique immittit *habenas*; and throw out now and then marks of a deep erudition, *Euboïcis Cumarum* allabitur oris: ſhe muſt paint in a lively manner the action ſhe deſcribes, *Obvertuit* pelago proras: ſhe muſt paint likewiſe the things *dente tenaci*; and the effects *fundabat*. She muſt make uſe of harmony. *Juvenum manus emicat ardens*, and number at the ſame time, littus *in* Heſperium. She muſt neverſay any thing but with a becoming dignity; and give an air of majeſty and grandeur to the meaneſt and moſt trivial circumſtances, *Quærit pars ſemina flammæ in venis ſilicis*. In ſhort as Deſpreaux has it:

Là, pour nous enchanter tout eſt mis en uſage;
Tout prend uu corps, une ame, un eſprit, un viſage.
Chaque vertu devient une Divinité:
Minerve eſt la prudence, & Vénus la beauté:

Ce

Ce n'eſt plus la vapeur qui produit le tonnerre;
C'eſt Jupiter armé pour effrayer la terre.
Un orage terrible aux yeux des matelots,
C'eſt Neptune en courroux qui gourmande les flots.
Echo n'eſt plus un ſon qui dans l'air retentiſſe:
C'eſt une Nimphe en pleurs qui ſe plaint de Narciſſe.
Ainſi, dans cet amas de nobles fictions,
Le Poëte s'égaie en mille inventions,
Orne, éléve, embellit, aggrandit toute choſe,
Et trouve ſous ſa main des fleurs toujours écloſes.

BOIL. art poet. chant 3.

Here fiction muſt employ its utmoſt grace,
All muſt aſſume a body, mind, and face;
Each virtue a divinity is ſeen,
Prudence is Pallas, Beauty Paphos queen.
'Tis not a cloud from whence ſwift lightnings fly,
But Jupiter that thunders from the ſky;
Nor a rough ſtorm that gives the ſailor pain,
But angry Neptune ploughing up the main.
Echo's no more an empty airy ſound,
But a fair nymph that mourns her lover drown'd.
Thus in the endleſs treaſure of his mind,
The poet does a thouſand figures find;
Around the work his ornaments he pours,
And ſhows with laviſh hand his op'ning flowers.

But now let us recapitulate in a few words the whole of what has hitherto been ſaid on the epic, that we may have our ideas more freſh about us, when we come to apply its principles to the two poems of Homer and Virgil, which we are proceeding to examine.

The

The firſt idea which occurs to the poet about to compoſe an epic poem, is to write a work that may immortalize the genius of its author, this is the artiſt's end in his labor. This idea naturally leads him to make choice of ſuch a ſubject as may intereſt a conſiderable number of people, and allow at the ſame time of the marvellous. Such a ſubject can be no other than an action.

In managing the ſeveral parts to reduce them to one ſingle body, he does like thoſe who have an undertaking in hand; he fixes upon ſome principal object, as a goal, and thither directs the actions of all his perſonages. This is the end of the work.

All the parts being thus diſpoſed to one ſingle end clearly marked out, the poet proceeds to avail himſelf of all the privileges of his art. Though his ſubject may be taken from an hiſtorical fact; yet he makes himſelf ſo abſolutely the maſter of it, that he adds, retrenches, tranpoſes, creates, and forms the machinery at his own diſcretion; he prepares at a diſtance the ſecret ſprings and moving cauſes, and draws the principal parts from the ideas he finds in elegant nature; he determines the characters of the perſonages, lays out the labyrinth of the plot, and diſpoſes the pictureſque part in ſuch a manner as beſt ſuits with the general intereſt of the work; and thus conducting his reader from wonder to

wonder,

wonder, he every now and then gives him a diſtant glance of ſomething ſtill more beautiful, which excites his curioſity and draws him inſenſibly on, till he comes to the winding up of the whole and the end of the poem.

It is true that neither civil life nor hiſtory are capable of furniſhing him with ſuch perfect and finiſhed pictures; but it is enough that they ſhew him the parts, and that he poſſeſſes in himſelf the requiſite principles to direct him in the compoſition of the whole.

The plan of the whole action being thus formed, he now invokes the muſe who is to inſpire him: and from the inſtant of this invocation he becomes quite another perſon.

——————————— Cui talia fanti
—— ſubito non vultus, non color unus;
Et rabie fera corda tument, majorque videri,
Nec mortale ſonans, afflata eſt numine quando
Jam propiore Dei——Tros Anchiſiade!——
Æn. 6.

He is as much in the ſkies as upon the earth: he appears quite full of the divinity, and ſpeaks to us in a tone of celeſtial enthuſiaſm, which precipitating itſelf through all the turns of a bold fiction, reſembles leſs the evidence of a ſcrupulous hiſtorian, than the extacy of a prophet, *hæc tum nomina erunt*, like the angel in the Paradiſe loſt.

Things by their names he calls, tho' yet un-nam'd.

His

His eyes are opened, and the poetic ſpirit, like the water of the well of life,

——————— pierces
Ev'n to the inmoſt ſeat of mortal ſight.

He ſees ages back the troubled Caſpian ſea, and the old Nile with its ſeven mouths diſmayed at the actions of his hero.

This majeſtic tone is kept up through the whole of his work, every thing is ennobled in his mouth: the thoughts, expreſſions, turns, and harmony, all is full of pomp and energy: not like a peal of thunder, which grumbles only at intervals, or gives a loud clap, and then dies away in ſilence; but, like the roaring of mighty waters, aſtoniſhes the traveller who hears the noiſe of its waves in ſome deep valley. In a word, it is a god relating the action of gods.

CHAP. XII.

The epic poems of Homer.

IN works of ſo great a length as an epic poem, a perſon, if ever ſo little prepoſſeſſed in favour of them, will eaſily find, or think he finds, all the qualifications that he is deſirous of finding in them.

Amidſt the great number of things which an epic poem contains, there muſt neceſſarily be ſome bad, which ought to be condemned; ſome indifferent, that may have a bad turn given to them;

them; and ſome, that though good, may undergo cenſure for want of entering into the true deſign of the author. An admirer of Homer will prove to you that he is the prince, the father of poets, nay the only poet that ever exiſted: according to Scaliger, Virgil is far ſuperior to him: with the Italians, Taſſo, in his Jeruſalem, far exceeds them both; and Mr. Addiſon, in the beginning of his panegyric on Milton, takes for his motto, *Cedite Romani ſcriptores, cedite Graii*, i. e. 'Give place ye Roman and 'ye Græcian bards, behold your maſter.' In ſhort there is ſcarce any work of this kind, however defective in point of real merit, but has, by the caprice of ſome one or other celebrated writer, been placed on a level with, or even above the fineſt models of antiquity.

To go about to reduce by authority, or perſuade by argument, thoſe who have already adopted, any party, would betray great want of knowlege in the conſtitution of the literary empire, and a profeſſed ignorance of the ſovereign and abſolute laws of taſte, which always rules like a tyrant, even when its principles of government are moſt juſt.

Whether there ever was ſuch a perſon as Homer.

Was there ever a Homer? Mr. Perrault is almoſt the only one who has ventured to doubt it. It is ſufficient to caſt ones eyes upon the Iliad,

Iliad, to ſee the unity of that work. The ſame end is every where kept in view, the ſame ſtile, and the ſame genius appears throughout the whole; which neceſſarily proves that one man alone could have been the author. Whether his name was Homer or not, is of very little ſignification to thoſe who are not fond of diſputing about words.

Who Homer was.

Seven conſiderable cities contended for the honor of giving birth to Homer; Smyrna, Rhodes, Colophon, Salamine, Scio, Argos, and Athens.

According to Herodotus, he was the ſon of a woman named Crithëis, who was delivered of him upon the banks of the river Melis, whence he had the ſurname of Meleſigenes. His life was, like that of many other great men, expoſed to the inſults of fortune. While living he had hardly any place to receive him; when dead he had temples built to his name: *Nunc non cinis ille beatus?* The qualities of his heart, which were truly admirable, are finely painted in his writings; where you ſee uprightneſs, ſimplicity, nobleneſs of ſentiments, and a modeſty which may ſerve as a model to all other poets; but which they in general come as near to, as they do to his merit as a writer.

His

His character.

This, Quintilian, one of the moſt excellent critics of antiquity, has deſcribed in a few words: 'No one (ſays he) ever exceeded him for ſublimity in great ſubjects, or propriety in common ones; he was at once eaſy and nervous, gay and ſolemn, and equally admirable in his copiouſneſs and brevity *.'

There is ſo creative a genius, ſo rich and luxuriant an imagination, an enthuſiaſm ſo nearly divine, and ſo powerful an energy, to be perceived through the whole of his writings, that make them as unaffected and natural, as if the work of nature herſelf.

The greatneſs of his merit is now-a-days univerſally allowed. 'The bulk of mankind (ſays Mr. Boileau) are ſeldom deceived for any conſiderable time in the judgments they form of works of taſte and genius. We are no longer at a loſs to know whether Homer, Plato, Cicero, and Virgil, were illuſtrious men in their way: this will no longer admit of a conteſt, ſince it is ſtamped with the aſſent of above twenty centuries; and after ſuch univerſal and continued teſtimonies it would be the

* Hunc nemo in magnis ſublimitate; in parvis proprietate ſuperaverit; idem lætus ac preſſus, jucundus & gravis, tum copiâ tum brevitate mirabilis. Quinctil. lib. 10. chap. 1.

'heigh

'height of folly and temerity to doubt of their 'merit *.'

There is one thing peculiar to Homer, that the greateſt part of his admirers are rather paſſionate lovers than prudent friends: they adore him with a kind of phrenzy, and ſhut their eyes to all his defects, reſolved to ſee nothing but his beauties. Now it is this overwarm and indiſcreet zeal in his friends that has raiſed him ſo many enemies, and ſo incenſed them, that as the firſt are blind to every thing but his beauties, the others are as obſtinate in ſeeing nothing but his faults.

We ſhall now give ſome account of his Iliad, and apply to it the definition we have already given of the epic. This is an affair of no ſmall importance, Homer being not only the father of poets; but at the ſame time the model and rule of taſte.

We ſhall endeavour to demonſtrate the genius of this great poet for invention, his taſte and ſkill in diſpoſition, and his energy and juſtneſs in expreſſion.

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* Le gros des hommes á la longue ne ſe trompe pas ſur les ouvrages de l'Eſprit. Il n'eſt plus Queſtion de ſavoir ſi Homere, Platoni, Ciceron, Virgile ſont des hommes merveilleux c'eſt un choſe ſans conteſtation, puiſque vingt ſiecles en ſont convenus; & aprés des ſuffrages ſi conſtants il y auroit non ſeulement de la temerité, mais même de la folie, à douter du merite de ces ecrivains. *Boil. Reflexion.*

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

Homer's invention in the Iliad.

THE Greeks laid ſiege to Troy: Agamemnon, who commanded their united forces, quarrelled with Achilles, the moſt valiant of their leaders; upon which this latter immediately refuſed to fight; and the Greeks were worſted, till this diſcontented hero, once more brought back by an incident which perſonally affected him, changed the fortune of their arms. This is the whole ſubject of the Iliad, and this is the foundation on which the ſtructure of that noble poem is raiſed.

Let us now examine its plan and elevation in the fable, as it is ſtiled in terms of art; or, in other words, the diſpoſition of the parts, the putting them together, or the frame. We ſhall ſomewhat enlarge the plan to render it more diſtinct, yet not ſo much but that it may be eaſily comprehended at one view.

The analyſis of the Iliad,

Book I. Chryſis the prieſt of Apollo, had preſented himſelf in the Grecian camp to offer a ranſom for his daughter, who was then Agamemnon's ſlave: that prince, naturally haughty and imperious, had, contrary to the advice of the other chiefs, ſent the old man rudely back.

Chryſis, in the height of his reſentment for this outrage, implores the god whom he ſerved to revenge him. His prayer was heard; Apollo deſcends in fury, ſhoots his vengeful ſhafts upon the Grecian army and lays it waſte. Achilles, affected with the ſufferings of the people, propoſes to conſult Calchas, a perſon of profound knowlege, and who had ſeveral times interpreted the will of the gods. This latter, encouraged by the protection of Achilles, openly accuſes Agamemnon, and decrees that the daughter of Chryſis ſhould be ſent back to her father. Agamemnon upon this grows outrageous; and nevertheleſs obeys, not without diſcharging his anger on Achilles himſelf, whom he threatens to deprive of Briſeïs; which threat he carries into execution, and that maid is taken from Achilles. The hero makes no oppoſition to this act of violence, becauſe ſhe had been given him as a part of the ſpoils of war: he delivers her up, but with the reſolution of being revenged by never returning to battle; and retires to the ſea-ſide, where he laments his loſs with a flood of tears from love and rage.

Thetis hears her ſon's complaints, and comes to comfort him; he earneſtly requeſts her to repair to heaven, and engage Jupiter to favour the Trojans, that Agamemnon may be made ſenſible of the error he committed in thus incenſing a hero whom it was his intereſt to have kept terms

with. The goddeſs inſtantly tranſports herſelf to Olympus, obtains the favour ſhe requeſts from Jupiter; nor could Juno, who patroniſed the Greeks, work any change in his reſolution.

Book II. It was now determined that Achilles ſhould be revenged, and the Greeks defeated by the Trojans. But to bring this about it was neceſſary that there ſhould be a battle. Jupiter ſends a lying dream to Agamemnon, on the faith of which that monarch inſtantly leaves his bed, and propoſes to attack the enemy. Neſtor, the moſt ſage and experienced leader in the Grecian army, gives a plan for the battle: prayers are offered up to Jupiter, the trumpets ſound: Minerva ſtriking on her divine Egid inſpires the whole camp with courage, and the armies appear in ſight of each other.

Book III. Paris, the raviſher of Helen, clad in a panther's ſkin, and armed with his bow and ſword, advances haughtily at the head of the Trojans. Menelaus, the huſband of Helen, eſpies him; he is a lion that perceives his prey. He leaps from his chariot, and flies at his enemy; but the guilty Trojan retires among the ranks, where he is reproached by Hector, the valiant ſon of Priam, with his cowardice and crimes, and with that beauty which has been ſo fatal to his country. Paris, ſtung with theſe reproaches, offers to engage Menelaus in ſingle combat,

combat, provided the fair Helen and her dowry be made the reward of the conqueror. This is agreed to. Iris, the meſſenger of the gods, deſcends to acquaint Helen with what has paſſed. That princeſs inſtantly throws by her work; it is a rich embroidery, wherein ſhe is repreſenting the combats which have already been fought upon her account. A tender remembrance of her former lord, her family and country, melts her into tears. The old men who ſaw her paſs felt themſelves moved with her beauty and the tears ſhe ſhed. 'But let her depart, cried they, 'let her go hence with the Greeks, rather than, 'by her fatal preſence, bring ruin upon us and 'ours.' She approaches Priam, 'Come my 'child, ſays that good prince tenderly to her, 'dry your tears; it is not you who are the cauſe 'of my diſaſters, but the angry gods. Come, 'and tell me the names of thoſe heroes I now 'ſee.' She names him Agamemnon, Ajax, and Ulyſſes; but not perceiving Caſtor nor Pollux, her two brothers, ſhe ſuppoſes that they were aſhamed to fight in her cauſe. A herald arrives from the two armies to require of Priam to give his oath, as they will not truſt to his ſons; an inſtance of whoſe perfidy they had lately met with in Paris. The agreement is made, and imprecations being denounced upon the firſt who ſhall infringe it, the two rivals enter the field. Paris is thrown to the ground; but Ve-

nus, who is his protectreſs, covers him with a cloud, and conveys him to an apartment in the palace, where Helen makes him the reproaches he juſtly deſerves.

Book IV. The affair was now decided, the combat was finiſhed, and Achilles had loſt all hopes of vengeance; but, happily for him, a ſuperior intereſt was concerned. This was Juno, whoſe invincible hatred to Troy made her wiſh its deſtruction. Minerva, in concert with this goddeſs, engages Pandarus to throw a dart at Menelaus; it wounds him in the thigh. Grief and indignation ſeize on the Grecian army; Agamemnon flies from rank to rank and exhorts the chiefs to combat; Mars ſpirits up the Trojans, and Minerva animates the Greeks. Terror, Fury, and Diſcord, the ſiſters of Mars, inſpire each ſide with ardor for the fight. Shields claſh with ſhields, lance meets lance, and the cries of the victors and vanquiſhed are heard on every ſide: the blood of the ſlain and wounded flows like a torrent from the mountains. Apollo informs the Trojans that Achilles is no longer a combatant.

Book V. But Diomedes, aided by Pallas, ſignalizes his valor; nothing is able to reſiſt the fury of his arm, gods and heroes give way before him. He overturns Xanthus, Thöon, Pandarus, and Æneas; wounds Venus and even

Mars himſelf; upon which theſe two deities quit the field.

Book VI. And now Hector, who had hitherto held the balance of victory, goes by the advice of Helenus to engage the Trojan ladies to offer gifts to appeaſe the wrath of Pallas: he returns again directly, and brings with him Paris, now more reſolved than ever to engage in battle.

Book VII. Theſe two chiefs appear at the very time their preſence was moſt wanted to ſuſtain the Trojans, who began to give way. But Apollo, willing to prevent the ſlaughter, inſpires Hector with the reſolution of defying the boldeſt of the Greeks to ſingle combat. Fortune throws the lot on Ajax, who gains ſome advantages; but night obliges the combatants to part: they quit each other full of mutual eſteem, and with reciprocal preſents. The Greeks avail themſelves of the favor of the night to fortify their camp with a rampart and paliſado; while the father of the gods cauſes his thunder to roll, as a preſage of the evils of the enſuing day.

Book VIII. Soon as the day appears Jupiter aſſembles the reſt of the gods; and after having expatiated in ſtrong terms on the unbounded and abſolute extent of his power, he ſtrictly forbids them to engage in the battle between the two nations. Himſelf deſcends upon the top of Mount Ida, where, envelopped in a thick cloud,

he looks down upon the two camps. The battle begins, and victory remains uncertain till noon; when Jupiter, taking a golden balance, weighs the fate of the two armies. The Trojans ſcale ſhies up; immediately the lightnings flaſh, the thunder roars, and the Grecian heroes diſmayed, find that Jupiter has declared againſt them. Diomedes having taken Neſtor, who was wounded, into his chariot, is for advancing againſt the Trojans; but the lightening falls at his horſes feet. Thrice he attempts to return, and thrice Jove ſhakes the heavens with his thunder: at length the hero yields, though with regret, and in compliance with the advice of the ſage Neſtor. The two goddeſſes, enemies to the Trojans, plainly perceive the intention of Jupiter in this; and that it is his purpoſe to revenge Achilles. The day cloſes; Jupiter reaſcends to heaven, and informs Juno of the decrees of the deſtinies in regard to Achilles. Hector prepares for an aſſault as the next day; he gives out his orders for that purpoſe, cauſes fires to be lighted every-where, leſt the frightened Greeks ſhould take advantage of the night to elude his vengeance.

Book IX. The Grecian camp wore a very different face to that of the Trojans: no fires to be ſeen; but a dead ſilence, and general conſternation reigned throughout: Agamemnon, who had at firſt propoſed to retire, now, by the advice of the ſage Neſtor, ſends Ulyſſes, Ajax,

and

and Phenix, as deputies to Achilles, to try to ſoften him, if poſſible, by offers of the moſt magnificent preſents. They are to offer him one of Agamemnon's own daughters, with a dowry of ſeven cities. Achilles receives the deputies in a generous and friendly manner; but refuſes their preſents, and rejects the proffered daughter of Agamemnon. 'For was ſhe fairer than 'Venus, and wiſer than Minerva, the next 'morning's light ſhould ſee him leave that ſhore 'and depart for his own country.' Phenix, who had formerly been his governor, reminds him of what he had done for him, and endeavors to perſuade him by the example of the gods, who ſuffer themſelves to be mollified by intreaties; but all in vain, he remains inexorable. The deputies return, and give Agamemnon an account of their ill ſucceſs. Every one ſeparates and retires to reſt.

Book X. But Agamemnon, a prey to the bittereſt inquietude, ſtrives in vain to cloſe his eyes. He ſees the Trojan fires; he hears the ſound of their trumpets; then caſting his eyes upon his own camp, tears his hair and pours forth floods of tears. He riſes and goes in ſearch of Neſtor: in his way he meets with Menelaus, who was no leſs diſturbed than himſelf: they both go to waken the reſt of the chiefs, who, the moſt of them had had but very little reſt: and, holding all together a council in the dark, they

ſend the valiant Diomedes and prudent Ulyſſes to ſpy the camp of the enemy. Minerva herſelf conducts the enterpriſe, which is attended with great ſucceſs. Diomedes kills Rheſus, carries off his horſes, and returns in triumph; which contributes a little to raiſe the ſpirits of the deſponding Greeks.

Book XI. Day-light appears; Jupiter raiſes a cloud of blood, a dreadful omen of the horrors and cruelties of that day. Agamemnon quite furious, at firſt puſhes the Trojans home to the very gates of Troy; but is at length wounded himſelf and retires. Now Hector arrives, ſpreading terror wherever he comes, and bears about him ſuch viſible marks of the ſpecial protection of Jupiter, that even Diomedes himſelf retreats before him, being wounded, as well as Ulyſſes. Eurypilus comes to their aſſiſtance, but being likewiſe wounded, is born back to the camp. Achilles, from the prow of his own veſſel, ſtands ſpectator of the fight, and hears the cries of the combatants: he diſpatches Patroclus to enquire what hero he ſaw borne back wounded: it proved to be Machaon. 'What matters 'it with Achilles, ſays Neſtor, ſpeaking to Pa-'troclus, who is wounded; he, that would 'with pleaſure behold the ruin of all the 'Greeks? why do not you, who are his friend, 'engage him to return to the fight? at leaſt 'come among us yourſelf, and bring his arms

'with

'with you.' Patroclus, in returning to Achilles, meets with Eurypilus bathed in his own blood; binds up his wound, and then haſtes to rejoin his friend.

Book XII. In the interim Hector is advanced as far as the ditch which ſurrounds the camp: he alights from his car, marches in five columns, he lifts a rock of a monſtrous ſize, with which he forces open the gates of the camp, and enters with a fury like that of a flood burſting its dams. The Greeks are put to flight.

Book XIII. Jupiter ſeeing the Trojans had ſo much the ſuperiority, and the Greeks moſt of them wounded, turns his eyes, for a while, from ſuch a ſpectacle of blood and horror to conſider an innocent and ſimple people who lived wholly on herbs and milk. Neptune takes advantage of this inſtant to ſpirit up the two Ajaxes. The Greeks rally, make a ſtand, and for a while put a ſtop to the progreſs of the Trojans: but Hector taking the choiceſt of his bands with him, falls upon the Greeks, who are repulſed in their turn: Neptune ſupports them. Juno ſeeing Neptune thus ſeconding the Greeks, borrows the ceſtus of Venus, the better to amuſe Jupiter, and takes ſleep with her as an aſſiſtant to lull him to reſt. Neptune advertiſed of what is paſſing, throws the advantage wholly on the ſide of the Greeks. Hector being very much

wounded, is carried off the field of battle, and the Trojans are immediately put to flight.

Book XIV. Jupiter awakes at that critical juncture, ſees Hector panting for breath, fainting, and vomiting torrents of blood: he inſtantly diſpatches Apollo to cure him, and commands Neptune to quit the fight. Hector returns to the field, conducted by Apollo; he fills up the ditch, and breaks down the walls of the camp: already he approaches the ſhips, which the Greeks endeavour to cover by cloſing their ranks. Ajax fights like a god. Patroclus acquaints Achilles of what paſſes; while Hector in a foam, covered with blood, ſweat, and duſt, drives the Greeks before him, makes himſelf maſter of one of the ſhips, and calls for torches to ſet it on fire.

Book XV. Patroclus at that inſtant burſts into tears before Achilles, who, touched with his grief, thus beſpeaks him; 'I ſee you are 'deeply afflicted, nor am I ignorant of the 'cauſe; but I have ſworn not to fight till Hector comes to my own ſhips. Do you, however, take my arms; go, fight if you will; 'but content yourſelf with hindering Hector 'from burning the ſhips; and do no more.' As he uttered theſe words he beheld the flames riſe from the ſhips, followed by thick clouds of ſmoke. 'Haſte, dear Patroclus, cries Pelides, 'ſtriking his thigh: while you are arming, I

'myſelf

'myſelf will aſſemble the ſoldiers.' Patroclus departs; Achilles offers up vows and libations for him to the gods.

The arrival of the friend of Achilles inſpires the Greeks with new life, and fills the Trojans with diſmay. Sarpedon, the ſon of Jupiter, falls by his hand. Hector, the valiant Hector himſelf, ſtruck with a panic by Jupiter, is obliged to give way: he flies into the city. Patroclus puſhes the advantage he has gained; but it is not long before Hector, re-animated and ſupported by Apollo, makes a vigorous ſally, in which Patroclus, deceived by that god, and run through the back by Euphorbus, receives his death's wound from the hand of Hector, who then ſtrips him of his arms.

Book XVII. The Greeks prevent him from carrying off his body: touched with the misfortunes of Achilles, in the loſs of his friend, they continue the fight a long time with the greateſt fury and deſperation. Ajax, almoſt beſide himſelf with rage and vexation, ſends Antilochus to acquaint Achilles with the mournful news of Patroclus's death.

Book XVIII. Antilochus appears before Achilles, whom he finds without ſide his tent, given up to the moſt gloomy thoughts. He informs him that Patroclus is no more: his grief is ſo ſtrong that he faints away: now he rolls in the duſt, ſends forth the moſt piercing

cries, and his breaſt heaves with the moſt rending ſighs. Thetis and the ſea nymphs iſſue from the waves: the whole ſhore rings with lamentations. Achilles is for ruſhing to the field, but Hector is maſter of his arms. Iris adviſes him only to appear, and cauſe his voice to be heard. He cries three times, and at each time the Trojans are ſtruck with dread: they quit the dead body of Patroclus, which is brought back to the camp. The day was now ended. Hector is adviſed to return into the town, ſince Achilles had appeared again; but he will not liſten to that ſalutary counſel. Thetis ſeeks out Vulcan, from whom ſhe receives a new ſuit of armour for her ſon.

Book XIX. She brings them to him by break of day. Achilles immediately calls for the Greeks; he is generouſly reconciled to Agamemnon. The principal leaders are employed in reſtraining his ardor, while the army takes a little refreſhment: they endeavor to comfort him for his loſs; but he talks to them of his friend Patroclus, and his own father Peleus, in ſuch an affecting manner, that they join their tears to his. At laſt he puts on his armour, which, ſo far from over-preſſing him with its weight, ſeems to raiſe him as if on wing; and now he vaults into his car, and flies to meet the foe.

Book

Book XX. Jupiter now leaves every thing to follow its natural courſe, which he had altered for the ſake of revenging Achilles; and all the gods that have an intereſt in the quarrel of the two powers, mingle in the combat. Achilles gives a thouſand proofs of courage, force, activity, and addreſs: not a foe eſcapes him; no leſs than a god is neceſſary to ſave Æneas and Hector from falling by his hand.

Book XXI. The Trojans are put to flight, and divided in the diſorder. Achilles drives a part of them into the Xanthus, which is filled with dead bodies, arms, and blood: he then turns upon the other party; the reſt fly for refuge to the town.

Book XXII. Hector alone was left in the field; nor the tears of his aged father, nor the ſupplications of his mother, who called to him from the top of the walls in the moſt piteous accents, could move his ſtubborn heart, or perſuade him to enter with the reſt. He waited for Achilles; as a dragon, full of the deadly juice of poiſonous herbs, all collected in his own ſtrength, and caſting his fiery eyes around him, waits in ſullen expectation the approach of the hunter. But lo! Achilles approaches, and Hector retires before him; nor, till after having fled three times round the walls of the town, could he determine with himſelf to riſk the combat. At length he turns, fights, and is ſlain

ſlain by Achilles; who, faſtening him to his chariot-wheels by his feet, drags him in that manner three times round the camp, in the view of Priam, Hecuba, and all the Trojans, whoſe cries aſcend to heaven.

Book XXIII. Achilles, now fully revenged, turns all his cares to the funeral of his friend, and has the rites performed with all the ſtate and pomp imaginable.

Book XXIV. and laſt. Priam comes to him to beg the dead body of his ſon Hector, which he grants in the moſt obliging manner, and treats Priam with every mark of diſtinction and tenderneſs due to his character and misfortunes.

This ſhort analyſis of the Iliad furniſhes us with a full idea of the whole work: Achilles reigns in every part; whatever is done, is done either by him, or for him; and he is ſtill the principal actor in the piece, whether he does, or does not actually appear. Let us now enter a little more into detail.

The action of the Iliad is Achilles avenged by Jupiter, but avenged beyond the utmoſt extent of his deſires; in ſhort, *Achilles over-revenged*. From this ſingle circumſtance has Homer had the art to form a poem, at once the moſt beautiful and longeſt of any extant. But how was it poſſible for him to produce ſo extenſive a work from ſo minute a ſubject?

In the firſt place he took things as they ſtood in their natural order. A hero, the ſtay and bulwark

bulwark of an army, is inſulted by the chief of that army: he reſolves to fight no more: the enemy draw ſeveral advantages from his abſence, and even make their ſuperiority felt by the enraged hero himſelf, in depriving him of what he held moſt dear in life: then, and not before, this hero returns to the fight, to take vengeance for his own loſs; and the enemy fly before him.

Our poet next took into conſideration the ſuper-natural cauſes. Nothing happens on earth, but by the orders and through the will of the gods. In conſequence of this univerſally-received opinion, he ſuppoſes that the gods favour the hero, who is juſtly incenſed, in order to humble the perſon by whom he has been offended; but yet, when this hero is to be brought back to the war, the ſame gods permit an incident, which brings him back, by nearly touching his own intereſt.

Theſe two orders of things, natural and ſupernatural, afford an immenſe field of matter. In the natural there is a town, the plain that ſurrounds it, and an army which is beſieging it. In the ſupernatural we ſee heaven, earth, the ſea, the ſhades below, and the ſeveral deities that inhabit each. Under the firſt of theſe the poet introduces morality, policy, hiſtory, phyſics; in a word, man, and whatever regards him. In the ſecond he places theology, religion, the

gods,

gods, and whatever is dependent on them. And as it is univerſally agreed that the divinity is the firſt cauſe, and man but a ſecond; the ſubordination of theſe two cauſes, one of which includes the other, joined to the unity of the end propoſed by both, occaſions the whole to be intimately blended; ſo that all the ſeveral movements are in one and the ſame direction; and all together give unity.

Homer has not only preſented us with an immenſe ſcope of ſcene, but has alſo had the ſkill to fill this up with an infinite number of objects of all kinds, as various as thoſe of the univerſe, and yet without being once needleſly repeated, or confounded with each other. There is a ſet of gods, each ſeparately characteriſed by their actions and ſpeeches: there is likewiſe a ſet of heroes, who, tho' all warriors alike, have yet their peculiar qualities by which they are on all occaſions known and diſtinguiſhed from one another. Each of theſe, both gods and heroes, have a number of actions peculiar to themſelves, which all bear the ſtamp of the particular actor, tend to the main action, and lead directly to the end propoſed by the poet. What a fertility of genius muſt there be, to produce ſo many objects! how extenſive its power, to reduce and reconcile them all to the principal ſubject!

It

It is the known character of the divinity, when in operation, to take in at one inſtant the means and the end, and to diſpoſe the one to arrive at the other in the moſt ſimple and natural manner. Now who comes ſo near to this character as Homer? he creates a world, the whole of which he takes in at one view: his genius tranſports itſelf with vigor from one end to the other: he diſpoſes a thouſand means, which follow each other, communicating mutual force in proportion as they approach, and augmenting in proportion as they communicate. It is a machine abounding with levers, which act in their proper place with equal certainty and force.

It would take up too much of our time to enter into a detail of his combats, and the actions of each principal character; it is a vaſt wood, where the imagination would bewilder itſelf. We ſhall therefore content ourſelves with ſhewing the difference and variety of the characters.

But it will be neceſſary to obſerve, by the way, that it is much eaſier to multiply and vary characters, by contraſting them, which at once doubles what was before ſimple, than to ſeparate and diſtinguiſh them from each other by their proper qualities, which are free from any contraſt or oppoſition between themſelves. Virtues and vices were in a heap before Homer, like colours on the pallet of the painter. He ſingled

out

out virtue for the baſis of all his characters; which he diſtributed in different portions to his ſeveral heroes, whom he has characteriſed by this diſtribution: ſuch as appear to be of the ſame kind, are heightened or lowered in a certain degree, ſometimes ſet off with a ſhade of vice, to make them approach nearer to nature; but on the whole, virtue is the predominant figure in the piece.

There is not a ſingle character of his, without ſome qualities to allay the odious in its compoſition, without excepting the raviſher Paris and the faithleſs Helen. They are the cauſes of a bloody and calamitous war, it is true; but Helen, by her ſorrów and contrition, and the bitter reproaches ſhe makes herſelf upon her conduct, ſeems to be culpable rather through the weakneſs natural to her ſex, than by any real principles of vice; and Paris receives the reproaches of Hector for his crimes with the moſt profound ſubmiſſion, and in acknowleging the juſtice of his cenſure. The character of Helen is affecting; that of Paris ſeems rather to claim our pity than demand our hatred. Hatred appears to be a ſentiment intirely unknown to the heart of Homer.

Let us in a few words take a review of his principal characters, which will enable us to form a judgment of the effects they produce in the

the poem from their own nature, or the force they receive from the poet's art.

Achilles poſſeſſes at once the ſtrength of Ajax, the valor of Diomed, and the courage of Ulyſſes, and all theſe in an eminent degree: the other characters, however ſtriking in themſelves, appear but as ſhadows, when near him, to whom every thing yields, and nothing can reſiſt. He has the ſofteſt ſentiments towards Patroclus; to whom he is the tender and zealous friend: he loves the people; and though by nature vehement and paſſionate, he is often reſtrained, by his reſpect for the gods, for old age in the perſon of Priam, and for the royal dignity in even Agamemnon himſelf.

The character of Hector appears the next in ſplendor to that of Achilles: he ſeems made to a degree of glory to the valor of this latter, who conquers him. His goodneſs, his courage, his love for his country, are qualities which gain him every heart. Though himſelf the moſt valiant of all the other heroes, the ſingle name of Achilles fills it with a reſpect mixed with dread. We love him, we lament, we reſpect him; but we admire Achilles, who can conquer him. One is the Horatius, the other the Curiatius of Corneille.

Agamemnon is the image of ſupreme authority: he has all the qualifications requiſite for a king; courage, vigilance, continued attention:

tion: he ſometimes abuſes the power he is inveſted with; is fierce and arrogant in proſperity, but humble to a degree of abjection in adverſity. He was to blame with reſpect to Achilles; and his abjection ſeems rather the effect of conſcious error, than any real weakneſs of mind.

In Priam we have an example of paternal love: he is tender, indulgent, but his great age makes him weak. Nothing can be more affecting than the picture of this old man, when he comes to demand of Achilles the body of his ſon Hector: his ſpeech on that occaſion is full of the moſt beautiful ſentiments; how unapt to pity ſoever Achilles was, he could not reſiſt ſo pathetic a diſcourſe.

Neſtor is old as well as Priam; but then his age is flouriſhing and vigorous. The fire of his courage yet burns within a breaſt worn out by many hardſhips. This old favourite of Mars finds his youth renewed at the very ſight of camps and battles. He is the chief in council: when he ſpeaks, it is of what he has ſeen or done, or of the heroes whoſe companions he had formerly been: he is always paſſing great encomiums on the paſt ages. In fine, his ſilver hairs grown grey under an helmet, give him a right of dictating even to Achilles and Agamemnon themſelves, to whom he offers his paſt life as a model.

Ulyſſes

Ulyſſes is thus deſcribed by Homer *: "In "council, and upon a public deliberation, he "ſeemed at firſt in confuſion, and diffident, "with eyes caſt down and fixed on the ground, "without the leaſt geſture or motion, or any "appearance of a great orator; but when he "was once raiſed and animated, he was no "longer the ſame perſon, but, like a torrent "that falls with impetuoſity from the ſummit of "a rock, he carried away every mind by the "force of his eloquence." As to his talents for war, his actions ſpeak them better than any words of ours could do: prudence and courage were united in the perſon of this favorite of Minerva.

In Diomed we have all that conſtitutes the complete warrior: ſword, fire, embattled ſquadrons of reſiſting enemies, were all too weak to ſtop the fury of his career. When wounded, "Draw out this dart," ſays he to his attendant, and away he flies to rejoin the battle.

Ajax Telamon was of a haſty diſpoſition, warm and impetuous. The following ſpeech of his ſufficiently characteriſes him: "Give us "but day-light, and let the gods themſelves "fight againſt us."

The other Ajax, ſurnamed Oileus, had much the ſame valor and heat in the combat as the

* Il. iii. v. 215, 224.

former,

former, but then he was of a rough and even rancorous diſpoſition, as appears from his manner of ſpeaking to Idomeneus in the twenty-third book.

Old man! (Oileus raſhly thus replies)
Thy tongue too haſtily confers the prize.
Of thoſe who view the courſe, not ſharpeſt ey'd,
Nor youngeſt, yet the readieſt to decide.
Eumelus' ſteeds high-bounding in the chace,
Still, as at firſt, unrival'd lead the race:
I well diſcern him, as he ſhakes the rein,
And hear his ſhouts victorious o'er the plain.

Mr. Pope.

Menelaus appears to have courage and reſolution; but on the whole ſeems rather made to govern a ſtate than defend it.

There are a number of other actors, whoſe parts, though not ſo conſiderable as the foregoing ones, are nevertheleſs each of them characteriſed, ſometimes by an hiſtorical ſtroke, at others by a particular and perſonal incident, or circumſtance remarkably intereſting.

Let us now caſt our eyes upon the characters of his gods. Here we find Jupiter acting with all the boundleſs power of ſupreme authority; Juno, with pride, fierceneſs, and cruelty; Minerva, with fortitude, courage, and the height of wiſdom; Mars, with a raſh and brutal force, like that of war, of which he is the ſymbol;

ſymbol; Neptune appears as over-bearing and furious as the element over which he reigns; Venus is all grace and ſoftneſs; and Apollo all wit and delicacy.

In the next place, let us ſuppoſe theſe ſeveral powers, natural and ſupernatural, each characteriſed in the manner peculiar to itſelf: let us ſuppoſe them in full motion in the ſkies, on earth, in the air, and waters, employing all nature to bring the thing in action to one certain end rather than another: in this caſe an infinite number of objects would preſent themſelves in groſs to our view, but we ſhould ſee a kind of chaos, wherein every thing lay confuſed together, unable to form a uniform world of themſelves, till order and regularity, the effects of a juſt diſpoſition, had taken place among them. Let us now ſee how Homer has effected this.

CHAP. XIV.

Homer's diſpoſition of the things.

EVERY diſpoſition in a work of art is either good or bad, regular or irregular, with reſpect to the object the artiſt propoſes to himſelf.

But what object has an epic poem? To raiſe the reader's admiration: And how is this to be raiſed? By the marvellous joined to the heroic? It was Homer's buſineſs then, to preſent us

with an hero, admirable for his natural qualifications and the wonderful protection he received from the Gods. This muſt be his end; and the diſpoſition of the ſeveral parts of his poem ſhould lead to this point, and this alone. Let us now examine whether it does ſo or not.

He has choſen for his hero the ſon of a goddeſs: hence ariſe two things; the firſt, that he is ſuperior to all other men, as being born both of a mortal and a goddeſs; the ſecond, that he has a right to the ſpecial protection of every deity that is a friend to his mother: he muſt be intitled to our admiration then both on his own account, and by the protection he receives from heaven. So much for his perſon, his character, and his qualifications.

But a man who does not act or perform ſomething, has no opportunity of recommending himſelf as an object of admiration; means muſt be found then to put this hero into action. But what kind of action will that be which ſhall repreſent him in every part, and in ſuch a manner, as to make him appear admirable in each, and through the whole?

Mankind admire thoſe things only which riſe a degree above the common order; and the more they exceed this, the more they admire them. Thus, to ſet forth Achilles as an object of admiration, it was neceſſary to do it, ſo as that he might be brought into compariſon. If he is

ſuperior

ſuperior to the common claſs of men, he muſt be a great man; if to the more exalted part of mankind, then he muſt be almoſt a god. This is the way Homer reaſoned. He has drawn the portraits of ſeveral great men; Achilles ſurpaſſes them all. But for the action: we have it in a few words.

Agamemnon, an unjuſt and haughty king, offers a glaring inſult to Achilles at the time they were beſieging Troy. Achilles, upon this, refuſes to fight for him any longer; the king imagines he can do as well without his aſſiſtance. he leads on a band of heroes, all renowned for their valour, againſt the Trojans, who nevertheleſs beat him; and he had been loſt for ever, but for the timely aid of Achilles, who ſaves him. This hero appears, and in his own perſon alone repulſes the enemy (who in vain make a ſtand) and triumphs in his turn. Here is a man greater than all the reſt together: but how comes he to be ſo much greater?

Becauſe he is the ſon of a goddeſs, and the father of the gods eſpouſes his cauſe.

But firſt of all let us ſee what conſequences enſue from this protection afforded him by Jupiter. The Trojans overcome the Greeks. And next, what advantage Achilles derives from his heavenly birth, when the fates are left to take their courſe? The Greeks are conquerors in their turn by the ſole valor of this hero. We

follow the poet a-while in this double point in view.

Jupiter, deſirous of avenging Achilles by puniſhing the Greeks, ſends a dream to Agamemnon, by which he is perſuaded to attack the enemy, which attack is to prove fatal to the Greeks: the two armies are now in motion. But as the reader is hitherto ignorant of the reaſon of theſe two people being at war, it would ſeem expedient firſt of all to explain the cauſes of this war.

To do this with the greater clearneſs, the poet ſets out with a ſingle combat between Menelaus, huſband to the fair Helen, and Paris, who had carried off the Princeſs. This is, perhaps, one of the moſt ingenious circumſtances in the Iliad; and at the ſame time appears ſo natural, that no one would ſuſpect it for the effect of art and deſign in the poet.

Both combatants, the injurer and the injured, appear in the middle of the camp, and the two nations who are intereſted in the event, while they are ſpectators of the combat, are themſelves made part of the ſpectacle. The cauſe of virtue is decided as it ought to be; the aggreſſor is thrown to the ground, and the injured remains conqueror: but what will become of Achilles and his revenge? Jupiter yields to the reſentment of Juno and Minerva, who heighten the diſpute now juſt ready to be decided:

cided: Menelaus is wounded by a dart from the Trojan camp, and the war begins again with redoubled fury: a battle enſues.

But to make it appear plainer that it was by Jupiter's will that Achilles is revenged, the event of the battle muſt at firſt depend upon the ſuperiority of force: wherefore the Greeks, who abounded in heroes, and were moreover protected by the two goddeſſes Juno and Pallas, repulſe the Trojans at the firſt onſet. Apollo was now to bethink him of a ſtratagem, and propoſe a ſingle combat between Hector and Ajax, to call off the attention of the Greeks, who were now conquerors, and ſtop the dreadful ſlaughter among the Trojan troops. Hitherto the Greeks triumph without the aſſiſtance of Achilles; and it ſeems probable, that had it not been for the particular will of Jupiter, Agamemnon would ſoon have ſeen himſelf in a condition to do without that hero.

Jupiter grows angry: his thunder is heard all night; and as ſoon as day appears, he forbids the gods from joining in the fight, and reſerves to himſelf the ſole power of regulating the fate of that day. This he does ſo as to have the Greeks beaten, and driven back to their very ſhips, to which the Trojans have already begun to ſet fire. Achilles is now revenged: Agamemnon is fully ſenſible of his fault, in having ill uſed the moſt valiant of his captains.

The offended hero, whoſe character is naturally good, has an inclination to fight; but being prevented by an oath he had made, he ſends forth his friend Patroclus, who is ſlain by Hector. To revenge his death, Achilles returns again to the field of battle.

Then Jupiter ceaſes to act; things take their natural courſe, and Achilles ſhews ſuch a ſuperiority of proweſs, that the whole Trojan army fly before him, Hector alone excepted, who is quickly after ſlain by the hands of the Grecian hero.

Thus Achilles is great by the ſpecial protection he receives from Jupiter, who puniſhes Agamemnon for having offended him. What glory for him to behold the fate of ſo many nations annexed to his ſingle perſon!

He is likewiſe great in himſelf, by the proof he gives of his valor, which is ſo prodigious, that not all the heroes of both nations were able to cope with him. He poſſeſſes, then, every qualification that can render him truly admirable.

But as admiration when joined to, or proceeding from fear and hatred, is in fact no other than dread and horror; this hero was at the ſame time to be made amiable. This character Homer has been very ſtudious to give him. He receives the baſeſt treatment at the hands of Agamemnon only for giving him a piece of ſa-

lutary

lutaay advice, which was the means of ſaving the army: from thenceforward his fortune becomes intereſting and affecting. He has appeared in the light of a good and generous man; he proves a tender friend, and a reſpectful adorer of the gods and their will; ſo that nothing diverts our admiration from him: we are fond of doing that juſtice to his merit which it appears to deſerve.

Beſides theſe great ſtrokes of genius, Homer has from time to time thrown in others, which ſerve to paint and ſet off his hero; but in that light and eaſy manner, which is ſo peculiarly the talent of Homer. The following paſſages are inſtances of this remark.

Apollo, when he would inſpire the Trojans with freſh courage and ardor, contents himſelf with crying out to them, That Achilles fights no more.

At the end of the firſt day, though the Greeks had ſomewhat the advantage, yet they begin to think of making a wall, a ditch, and palliſadoes, to render their camp more ſecure againſt any ſudden attack of the enemy: a thought which had never entered their heads before during the whole time of the ſiege: but Achilles was then their rampart.

After the ſecond day, all the Grecian chiefs paſs the night in the moſt cruel agitations: they

know not which way to reſiſt Hector; the wall ſeems too weak a defence.

The third day, their ditch is filled up, their wall is thrown down, and their ramparts demoliſhed; almoſt every one of their heroes is wounded, and the reſt of their men ſlain by the ſword of Hector. But Achilles appears once, that is ſufficient: the whole Grecian camp ſleep ſecure in the confidence they repoſe in him, and the Trojans, though victors in the field, call a council to conſider about retiring into the town.

Achilles appears the next day; victory no longer remains doubtful. The Trojans are put to flight, and Hector, the only one among them who dared remain without the walls, is ſlain.

Laſtly, in the twenty-third book, there is a celebration of funeral games: Achilles fights not here, becauſe the games are given by him in honor of his deceaſed friend Patroclus; but we are told, that, had he fought, he would have carried away all the prizes.

We have now ſeen Achilles great in the protection of the gods, and great in himſelf; but he is ſo in another manner yet, and that is, when compared with the reſt of the heroes his companions.

Homer has four heroes principally diſtinguiſhed for their valor; theſe are Diomed, Ajax, Patroclus, and Hector. He muſt raiſe the glory

glory of theſe heroes, the better to eſtabliſh that of Achilles. When Achilles is preſent, theſe four are totally eclipſed: but if theſe heroes were not to ſignalize themſelves in their turn by ſome great exploit, the actions of Achilles would want much of that luſtre they now receive from the compariſon. What does Homer then in this caſe? he lets Achilles juſt appear at firſt, and then ſuddenly removes him from our ſight; and then it is that he makes the valor of Diomed break forth with éclat: Mars and Venus are wounded by him; he is afterwards wounded himſelf, and carried from the fight. Ajax takes his place, and does yet greater things than he had done; but at length, overpowered by numbers, is obliged to yield. Patroclus now arrives, clad in the arms of his friend Achilles; but he is ſlain by Hector. At length Achilles appears; and appears rather like a god than a hero, when compared with the others.

Homer is no leſs admirable in his diſpoſition of the marvellous. Achilles having received a cruel affront, grows deſperate upon it: he makes a prayer to his mother, who immediately goes to implore Jupiter to revenge her ſon. The god promiſes to grant her requeſt, and keeps his word: every thing that paſſes on the plains of Troy, is in virtue of this diſpoſition made in heaven. Here we may perceive, that the ſpirit which compoſed the Iliad, was poſſeſſed of a

lively ſenſe of religion; refers all to the gods, whom he makes preſide over every thing. It is they who enlighten the underſtanding, inſpire the heart with courage, or fill it with fear and diſtruſt; who preſerve one, cauſe another to periſh, as ſeems beſt in their eyes; and this by an inviſible power, which covers itſelf with a cloud, not to ſtrike men with terror and aſtoniſhment, but to leave them in a happy ignorance of their future deſtiny.

This is the art employed by Homer, to arrive at his end; which is that of exciting admiration.

But as the firſt requiſite to excite a real admiation is, that the action to be admired ſhould in itſelf be real, or at leaſt have the appearance of being ſo; therefore Homer has taken great care that every thing he relates ſhould be within the bounds of probability. Nothing can be more natural than the effects he aſſigns to the cauſes he makes act: he prepares them ſo ſkilfully, and at ſuch due diſtance, that it is hardly poſſible that the action ſhould follow the cauſe. I ſhall only cite one example of this.

Achilles is to be brought back to the field by degrees. At firſt he is acquainted with the loſs the Greeks have ſuſtained ſince his abſence; he appears touched with it: this is the firſt degree. The deputations that arrive from the camp, give him to know that Agamemnon is humbled:

 ſecond

ſecond degree. From his tent he hears the cries of the combatants, ſees Machaon brought back to the camp, diſpatches Patroclus to know who the wounded perſon is: this is the third degree. Neſtor reproaches Patroclus, that he, at leaſt, does not come to the fight, if Achilles refuſes it; the fourth degree. Achilles is affected with this; and now he ſees Hector ready to ſet fire to the ſhips: he gives his arms to Patroclus; ſixth degree. Patroclus is ſlain, and Achilles ſallies forth to fight. Now, the rudiments of this laſt revolution were intire in the firſt degree of ſentiment, which was to determine it: from the firſt degree there was an impreſſion made, and the emotion growing greater and greater, the hero is at length brought back to the field. In this manner does this excellent poet connect his ſeveral events: things ſeem not only to follow, but mutually to beget each other.

CHAP. XV.

Of Homer's elocution.

THE greateſt enemies of Homer cannot diſpute him this excellence. His ſtile has always been conſidered by antiquity as the moſt perfect model of its kind, as well for choice, as diſpoſition, of words. We at preſent can have but very faint ideas of theſe

beauties: we know, at moſt, but the value of words, and cannot judge how far they are noble or not, or whether each is the real word, and occupies its proper place. Beſides, we are not ſure of the pronunciation; our organ does not ſeem fitted for it: ſo that if Homer enchants us, we owe the ſatisfaction wholly to the beauty of the things, and the boldneſs of his ſtrokes; which, though they appear almoſt effaced to us, yet have infinitely more charms than the greateſt part of the modern ones, which boaſt of colors more freſh and lively.

He every where carries the marks of the ſame genius; for the genius communicates its impreſſion through the whole, from the firſt creation of the ſubject, to the moſt minute expreſſion. His eloquence is as vigorous as his hero: his fire does not fly off in little ſparks, but burns with one bright and continued flame: the things themſelves, and not their images, preſent themſelves to us. Here are no glittering antitheſes, artificial interrogations, or little furtive metaphors, ſlid in for the ſake of being remarked; all here tends to good ſenſe, reaſon, and truth. His narration proceeds with an equal, uniform pace, through upwards of ſixteen thouſand lines; and full of fire, energy, and grace, places the objects immediately before the eyes of its readers or hearers. It is ſo natural and well connected, that one would almoſt ſay the

poet

poet had done no more than juſt write down what nature dictated to him.

Homer is admirable in expreſſing the nature of the things he deſcribes, by the ſound and order of the words. When he deſcribes the wind whiſtling through the cordage, and rending the ſails, we think we hear the crackling and ruſtling in his lines.

. . . . . ἱστια δὲ σφιν
Τριχθάτε ϗ τετραχθὰ διέσχισεν ἲς ἀνέμοιο. Odyſſ. ι. 7.

Now here, now there, the giddy ſhips are borne,
And all the rattling ſhrouds in fragments torn.
POPE.

On the other hand, nothing can be more gentle or harmonious, than the paſſage where he deſcribes the ſoft and perſuaſive eloquence of Neſtor.

. . . . . τοῖσι δὲ Νέςωρ
Ἡδυεπὴς ἀνόρουσε, λιγὺς Πυλίων ἀγορητὴς
Τοῦ ϗαὶ ἀπὸ γλώσσης μέλιτος γλυκίων ῥέεν αὐδή.
Il. α. 247.

To calm their paſſions with the words of age,
Slow from his ſeat aroſe the Pylian ſage,
Experienc'd Neſtor, in perſuaſion ſkill'd,
Words ſweet as honey from his lips diſtill'd.
POPE.

The following verſe ſurpriſingly expreſſes the great pains and labor of Siſyphus, in rolling a

monſtrous ſtone up a ſteep hill; the very line heaves with him.

Λᾶαν βαςάζοντα πελώριον ἀμφοτέρηφιν. Odyſſ. λ. 93.

Up the high hill he heaves a huge round ſtone.
POPE.

But when it has reached the ſummit, back it rolls again, and with it the verſe.

Ἄοτος, ἑωτετὰ πέδονδε κυλίνδεται λᾶας ἀναιδής. Ibid. 97.

Thunders impetuous down, and ſmokes along the ground, POPE.

In the following paſſage, the rapidity of the the ſecond verſe may diſpute it with that of the horſe, whoſe ſwiftneſs Homer is deſcribing.

Οἷοι τρωσὶ ἵπποι, ἑκατηβόλον πρόσσω
Κραιπνὰ μάλ' ἴθυσαι καὶ ἴθυσαι διώκεμεν ἰδὲ φέεσθαι.
Il. ε. 222.

Swift at the ſcourge th' ethereal courſers fly,
While the ſmooth chariot cuts the liquid ſky.
POPE.

'Tis probable Virgil had this beauty in his eye, when he wrote this line.

Quadrupedante putrem ſonitu quatit ungula campum. Æn. viii. 59. 6.

In his deſcription of a battle, we hear the claſhing of armor, the din of war, the tumult of the croud, the rumbling of Jove's thunder, and

and the earth that reſounds beneath the feet of the combatants: we are no longer with the poet, but in the midſt of his heroes; we do not read his work, we ſee, we hear, we are preſent at every thing he relates; mind, imagination, heart, every faculty of the ſoul, is taken up and filled with the greatneſs of the incidents, the livelineſs of the painting, and the harmonious cadence of the poetic ſtile.

We ſhall not produce any particular paſſages, having given, in the two preceding articles, a ſufficient detail to furniſh matter of application. Beſides, there is no ſmall difficulty in chuſing, amidſt ſuch a group of dazzling beauties.

The ſentiments are ſome of them of the ſame nature as that before cited in the ſpeech of Ajax.

Others again conſiſt in lively images; as, 1. When * Neptune makes his chariot fly over the waters, the waves raiſe themſelves up on each ſide, Ocean exults for joy, and the ſea gods, in aukward gambols, acknowledge the preſence of their monarch. 2. † Jupiter ſhakes his locks, and the whole univerſe trembles. 3. ‡ Neptune ſtrikes the earth with his trident, and Pluto, with a great cry, leaps from his throne affrighted, leſt his dark dominions ſhould be

* Il. xiii. 17, &c. † Il. i. 528. ‡ Il. xx.

be laid open to the day. 4. ‖ Patroclus is dead; every thing belonging to Achilles is overwhelmed with affliction: his horſes of divine race remain fixed and immoveable with grief, their heads bowed down to the earth, their mains trailing in the duſt, and the tears trickling down their faces in big drops to the ground. * Priam enters the tent of Achilles to demand of that hero the body of his ſon Hector; throws himſelf upon his knees, takes his hands and kiſſes them, thoſe murderous hands, yet reeking with the blood of his ſlaughtered children. What a force of expreſſion is here! †

But

‖ Il. xvii. 437. * Il. xxiv. 485, &c.

† The whole of this ſpeech is ſo inimitably beautiful and affecting, and our countryman, Mr. Pope, has done ſo much juſtice to the great original, in preſerving every grace, every dignity of expreſſion, in his elegant verſion of the Iliad, that I could not diſpenſe with giving it a place here, for any of our readers who may not juſt have at hand the author himſelf.

Ah think, thou favor'd of the pow'rs divine!
Think of thy father's age, and pity mine:
In me, that father's rev'rend image trace,
Thoſe ſilver hairs, that venerable face;
His trembling limbs, his helpleſs perſon, ſee!
In all my equal, but in miſery!
Yet now, perhaps, ſome turn of human fate
Expels him helpleſs from his peaceful ſtate;
Think, from ſome pow'rful foe thou ſee'ſt him fly,
And beg protection with a feeble cry.

Yet

But what ſhall we ſay of his ſimiles, where the richneſs and fertility of his imagination paincipally appear? One would imagine, that all nature had exhauſted itſelf, to embelliſh his poems with an infinite variety of images and ſimilitudes.

When

Yet ſtill one comfort in his ſoul may riſe;
He hears his ſon ſtill lives to glad his eyes;
And hearing, ſtill may hope, a better day
May ſend him thee, to chaſe that foe away.
No comfort to my griefs, no hopes remain,
The beſt, the braveſt of my ſons are ſlain!
Yet what a race? ere Greece to Ilion came,
The pledge of many a lov'd and loving dame;
Nineteen one mother bore—Dead, all are dead!
How oft, alas! has wretched Priam bled!
Still one was left, their loſs to recompence;
His father's hope, his country's laſt defence.
Him too thy rage has ſlain! beneath thy ſteel,
Unhappy, in his country's cauſe he fell.
For him, through hoſtile camps I bend my way,
For him, thus proſtrate at thy feet I lay;
Large gifts, proportion'd to thy wrath, I bear;
Oh, hear the wretched, and the gods revere!
Think of thy father, and this face behold!
See him in me, as helpleſs and as old!
Though not ſo wretched: there he yields to me,
The firſt of men in ſov'reign miſery.
Thus forc'd to kneel, thus grov'ling to embrace
The ſcourge and ruin of my realm and race;
Suppliant my children's murd'rer to implore,
And kiſs thoſe hands yet reeking with their gore.

* When Menelaüs goes forth to engage Paris he is compared to a hungry lion, who beholds his prey, and darts forward to devour it: while Paris ſtarts back aſtoniſhed, like a traveller whoſe unwary foot has trod upon a ſnake † Mars, when wounded, and obliged to quit the field, goes off with a noiſe like the roaring of hoarſe thunder. Homer's comparing Paris to a courſer, is one of the moſt celebrated of his ſimilies, and is too beautifnl to be omitted here:

Ὡς δ' ὅτε τις σατὸς ἵππος ἀποῤῥήξας ἐπὶ φάτνῃ,
Δεσμὸν ἀποῤῥήξας θείῃ πεδίοιο κροαίνων,
Εἰωθὼς λέεσθαι ἐυῤῥεῖος ποταμοῖο,
Κυδιόων, ὑψοῦ δὲ κάρη ἔχει, ἀμφὶ δὲ χαῖται
Ὦμοις ἀΐσσονται· ὁ δ' ἀγλαΐῃφι πεποιθὼς,
Ῥίμφα ἑ γοῦνα φέρει μετὰ τ' ἤθεα καὶ νομὸν ἵππων.
Ὡς υἱὸς Πριάμοιο Πάρις καλὰ Περγάμου ἄκρης
Τεύχεσι παμφαίνων, ὥσ' ἠλέκτωρ ἐβεβήκει,
Καγχαλόων, ταχέες δὲ ποδὲς φέρον *.

The wanton courſer thus, with reins unbound,
Breaks from his ſtall, and beats the trembling ground;
Pamper'd and proud he ſeeks the wonted tides,
And laves, in height of blood, his ſhining ſides;
His head now freed he toſſes to the ſkies;
His mane diſhevel'd o'er his ſhoulders flies;
He ſnuffs the females in the diſtant plain,
And ſprings exulting to his fields again.

With

* Il. xiii. 20. † Il. v.

With equal triumph, ſprightly, bold, and gay,
In arms refulgent as the god of day,
The ſon of Priam, glorying in his might,
Ruſh'd forth with Hector to the fields of fight.
POPE.

But were we to take a full view of all the beauties in this poet, it would add too much to the length of the work, and we ſhould bewilder ourſelves and the readers in the flowery labyrinth. The Iliad is a ſpacious edifice, adorned with all manner of figures, ſublime, noble, majeſtic, gay, agreeable, ſimple, touching, tender, and delicate: the nearer ones behold it, the more one admires it, aſtoniſhed at the dimenſion, richneſs, depth, and magnificence of the architect's genius.

Let us now ſay a word concerning the hiſtory of Homer's poems.

According to Ælian, they were formerly ſung about in detached pieces, each of which had ſome particular title; as, the fight of the ſhips, the death of Patroclus, the grotto of Calypſo: theſe were called rhapſodies; and thoſe who ſang them rhapſodiſts. It was Piſiſtratus king of Athens, who firſt made a collection of theſe, ranked them in their proper order, and from thence compoſed the two bodies of poems which we have at preſent under the names of the Iliad and Odyſſey. After this there appeared

ſeveral

ſeveral other editions. Ariſtotle compiled one for the uſe of Alexander the Great, who placed it in a very rich caſket, which had been found among the ſpoils of Darius; from whence it was named *the edition of the caſket*. At length, Ariſtarchus, whom Ptolomy Philomater had made tutor to his ſon Evergetes, made ſo correct and complete an one, that his name has ever ſince been that of a ſound good critic. We ſay an Ariſtarchus, when we ſpeak of a good judge in matters of taſte and literature. It is ſaid the edition we have at preſent is the ſame with his.

CHAP. XVI.

Of Homer's faults.

THOUGH we only propoſed a juſtification of our own thoughts on the ſubject, by comparing them with the manner of Homer; and not to juſtify Homer himſelf if he ſhould be found to have faults: yet one would willingly ſay a word or two on this head, that young people may not be wholly without an anſwer when they meet with a Zoilus in their way.

I am very fond of the manner in which Horace finds fault with Homer: it is rather a ſuſpicion than an abſolute accuſation; aud he ſeems half angry with himſelf for having ſuch a ſuſpicion: *indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Ho-*

ſuſpicion:

merus. I am vexed, ſays he, whenever Homer happens to nod.

But it does not follow from hence, that an excellent writer ſhould be looked on as abſolutely perfect, and intirely exempt from faults. Homer is, doubtleſs, a great man; but ſtill he he is a man; and, as ſuch, ſubject to be ſometimes in the wrong. But then theſe defects are concealed, and in a manner loſt amidſt an infinite number of graces and inimitable beauties, which affect and tranſport us: nor ſhould theſe faults hinder us from paying the regard that is due both to the work and the author, according to the judicious obſervation of Horace:

Verum ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendor maculis, quas aut incuria fudit
Aut humana parum cavit natura.

HOR. de ART. POET.

Again, we ſhould be very careful not to impute ſuch faults to Homer, as ſubſiſt only in the imagination of prejudiced or ignorant critics. Several are offended with certain words which ſeem too low and mean for a poem of this kind, as kettle, pot, guts, &c. that are frequently met with in Homer, but not to be uſed without being ſhocking in our languages. I would refer theſe gentlemen to Mr. Boileau and Mr. Pope, in their excellent notes upon this author.

His

His ſpeeches are ſome of them cenſured, as being too tedious and prolix; theſe are chiefly Neſtor's; but then they are certainly in character, for old men are fond of talking of the times paſt, and of relating the adventures and exploits of their youth.

Sometimes his ſimiles appear rather ignoble and even vulgar, though generally very juſt; as that of an aſs driven from the corn by children retires ſlowly, and ſcatters the corn on each ſide of him, to Ajax. Ajax, preſſed by his enemies, retires with a ſlow pace, and kills numbers while he is going off. Another hero returns to the fight, like an obſtinate fly, which returns again and again after being driven away. Theſe images are all of them juſt; and thoſe who are diſguſted by them, are ſuch as only perceive the naked object, ſtripped of all the nobleneſs of expreſſion that ſets it off, and left to its own native meanneſs.

His deſcriptions are ſometimes too particular, and his repetitions offenſive; as in the dreſs of ſome of his heroes, the working of a ſhip when it puts into, or goes out of, a port, &c. Thoſe who are fond of prying into ancient cuſtoms, are charmed with the minuteneſs of the detail; not ſo, thoſe who looking no farther than for the poet, do not like an interruption of ſtory.

Every one muſt allow, that his gods appear, in general, with too little dignity, and are much

much inferior to his heroes: but then it ſhould be conſidered, that they are not of Homer's creation; he has deſcribed them ſuch as they were believed to be in his time; and thoſe who have ſtiled him the father of mythology, mean no more by it, than that he firſt collected and fixed, by his poems, the many vague opinions which ſubſiſted concerning the gods, in different nations, and with different people. To require order and decency in the pagan mythology, is to ſeek reaſon in the midſt of folly. We now-a-days ſhould look upon the gods in Homer, as repreſentations of the burleſque kind, but executed by the hand of the greateſt maſter, in conformity to the ideas of thoſe for whom he wrote. And this is the true and only point of ſight they ſhould be conſidered in, if we would form a right judgment concerning them.

None of the antients have ever condemned Homer for his repetitions; on the contrary, they conſidered them as a merit in him. "I know not how it is," ſays Macrobius, "that Homer's repetitions appear pleaſing in "him, and would do ſo in no one elſe." This character admirably ſuits the nature of the work, and the antiquity of the author. Nothing ſo cools the warmth of compoſition, or throws ſuch a damp on the poetic fire, as a ſlaviſh attention to avoid repetition by a continual variation of the moſt minute circumſtances:

ſtances: in this, as well as in many other things, Homer appears to have deſpiſed the unpleaſing labor of a ſcrupulous correction. A great painter does not look upon himſelf obliged perpetually to vary his pieces, leſt one ſhould a little reſemble another; provided the principal figures have nothing of a ſameneſs, we eaſily overlook the likeneſs of the ſky, ground, or drapery.

He conſtantly gives one epithet to his heroes; the reaſon of which is, that, in the time of Homer, epithets made a part of the name, and they never ſpoke of any perſon of eminence or diſtinction, without ſubjoining ſome commendatory title: a cuſtom which the orientals keep up to this day. And we have inſtances among ourſelves, where it would be impoſſible to diſtinguiſh ſeveral names, without an epithet of ſome kind, as, *Louis le gros*, *Louis le jeune*, *Edward the confeſſor*, *Edward the black prince*.

Homer's heroes have been condemned for their want of decency in their expreſſions of anger: a great part of this accuſation falls to the ſhare of Achilles. Mr. de la Mothe, who reproaches him with this, would have this young impetuous warrior, boiling with rage and anger, as moderate and calm as a philoſopher; and from two or three Greek words, which cannot be rendered in our language but by groſs and vulgar terms, he currently infers, that Achilles is as ſcurrilous as Therſites; then concluding in

general, from one particular, he lays the ſame fault on every hero in the Iliad.

Laſtly, the cruelties exerciſed on the enemy in the time of war, were never regarded in the light of cruelties, either by the Greeks or Romans: their very religion permitting the conqueror, in that caſe, to ſacrifice the beſt of the priſoners taken from the enemy, to the manes of a deceaſed friend. This is ſo true, that the hero of the Æneid, a perſon ſo famed for his wiſdom and piety, reſerves the young captives, to immolate them at the funeral pile of Evander's ſon.

——— Sulmone creatos
Quatuor hic juvenes, &c.

Thoſe who charge the heroes of the Iliad, as a crime, with being inflexible to tears or intreaties, and yielding to nothing but for the ſake of ranſom, nor ever pardoning any one but with a view of enriching themſelves; thoſe who impute this to him as a crime, I ſay, are only exclaiming againſt the cuſtoms authoriſed by the laws of war, the rights of nations, and the manners of the particular age and country they lived in. Beſides, it is of but very little conſequence whether the manners deſcribed by Homer are good or bad in themſelves; the queſtion is only, whether, in his time, and at the time

time Troy was beſieged, the manners were really ſuch as he has deſcribed them.

I ſhall not take any notice of another reproach caſt on Homer, viz. that of having made his hero too cruel. Theſe muſt be people who know Achilles but by that picture of him in Horace, rather than by having ſeen him in the Iliad. Achilles was full of vivacity, impetuous, choleric, and terrible in his anger; but with all that, he was full of goodneſs and humanity, beloved of the gods, admired and reſpected by all the Greeks; not even Priam, and the Trojans themſelves, can ſay any ill of him: and if he is guilty of what appear cruelties to us, they were duties in him, according to the ideas and cuſtoms of Homer's time.

But thoſe who are fond of Father Boſſu's ſyſtem, will not pardon me if I do not find out the particular moral which Homer has inculcated in his Iliad: and though I can by no means think, with that author, that an epic writer firſt of all pitches upon a certain moral, as the ground-work and foundation of his poem, and afterwards forms a ſtory to it; yet, as I am of opinion that no heroic poem ever was, or can be made, from whence ſome great moral may not be deduced, I ſhall briefly conſider the maxims which occur upon reading the Iliad. The firſt is, that the Divinity preſides over all,

and

and acts in all, and that nothing is done without it; this ſeems to be the principal moral Homer has in view. The ſecond is, that oftentimes thoſe who beg heaven to revenge them, have reaſon, at length, to repent having their prayers heard: this ariſes from the action. When I conſider Agamemnon's behaviour, and the conſequences of it, I am ready to agree that we ſhould not incenſe thoſe of whom we may ſtand in need. When I conſider Achilles, I reflect, that the pleaſure of revenge often coſts men too dear. On conſidering the Greeks and Trojans, I find, that the people are often puniſhed for the folly or madneſs of the prince: and laſtly, I ſhall ſay, in ſeeing the effects produced by the preſence and abſence of Achilles, that two men together are ſtronger than one without the other. Theſe, now, are all very good maxims; but not one of them, I am perſuaded, ever contributed to form the ground-work or foundation of Homer's poetical edifice.

Concluſion.

As the epic, in general, is a poetic recital of ſome extraordinary action; we may define the Iliad, the poetic recital of the extraordinary vengeance of Achilles; the Odyſſey, the poetic recital of the ſurpriſing return of Ulyſſes; and the Æneid, the poetic recital of the wonderful eſtabliſhment of Æneas in Italy. We ſhall

now proceed to give the fable of theſe two poems, but in a much ſhorter manner than we have done that of the Iliad.

CHAP. XVII.

The fable of the Odyſſey.

THE ſubject of the Odyſſey is, as we have already ſaid, the return of Ulyſſes to Ithaca; a ſmall iſland, of which he was king. This hero did not enjoy the advantage of being a demi-god by birth, like Achilles, who was the ſon of Thetis; but, nevertheleſs, he poſſeſſed all the merit of ſuch a birth; that is to ſay, he poſſeſſed fortitude more than human, and a prudence which knew no bounds; to theſe was added the protection of Minerva: ſo that on the whole he appears as great a ſubject for admiration as even Achilles himſelf.

In the Iliad we ſee nothing but battles and combats; there force alone triumphs. In the Odyſſey we have a ſcene of continual misfortunes and dangers, from which the *man* extricates himſelf by means of his great prudence and extraordinary patience. In the Iliad, the ſupreme and omnipotent deity Jupiter preſides over and directs the conduct of the whole, with the authority of an abſolute maſter. In the Odyſſey, the goddeſs of wiſdom and prudence

dence guides *the man*, and preſerves him from the dangers that threaten him.

The Iliad is intended to affect, ſurpriſe, and agitate the paſſions. The Odyſſey, rather to inſtruct by its allegorical narrations, deſcriptions and maxims: for which reaſon, Achilles, in the one, is a great warrior, and that alone; in the other, Ulyſſes is a wiſe man; and ſuch an one as had to combat even againſt the misfortunes and accidents of human nature.

The Odyſſey opens by a council of the gods, in which the return of Ulyſſes is decreed. Minerva, on her ſide, intereſts herſelf for the young Telemachus; whom ſhe endeavors to render worthy of appearing with ſuch a father, whenever he ſhall return. Mercury is diſpatched to acquaint Calypſo with the reſolves of the gods, and to order her to ſuffer Ulyſſes to depart. This hero ſets out alone, croſſes the ſeas in a pitiful little boat, and is at length caſt on ſhore upon an iſland belonging to the Pheacians, by a dreadful tempeſt which had been raiſed for that purpoſe by Neptune, the god of the ocean. In this iſland he remains, till the inhabitants grant him a veſſel to tranſport him to Ithaca; where he at length arrives, and, by the aſſiſtance of Minerva, puts to death every one of thoſe who had taken the advantage of his ab-

ſence to commit the greateſt diſorders in his kingdom, and even in his very houſe.

This is the fable of the Odyſſey, omitting ſome few narrations, which the poet has thrown in by way of epiſodes, or paſſages, that may be admitted or rejected without any way affecting the nature of the poem. Both poems, the Iliad and Odyſſey, are alike in their theology; and the ſame diſpoſition of celeſtial, with terreſtrial cauſes, takes place in each: the divinity preſides, and rules over every thing: without this circumſtance it would be no epic poem. Let us now proceed to the Eneid.

CHAP. XVIII.

A review of the Eneid.

IN reading Homer, we look upon him as a poet, who, in the times he lived, was like a ſingle light in the midſt of ſurrounding darkneſs; quite alone, with none but nature to direct him; deſtitute of advice, books, or the ſociety and converſation of learned men; abandoned intirely to the force of his own genius, or inſtructed by the muſes alone; ſo ſimple, genuine, and artleſs is his manner.

On the contrary, when we come to open Virgil, we find ourſelves entered into an enlightened world, and perceive that we are in a nation where taſte and magnificence have their reſi-

reſidence; where all the arts, ſculpture, painting, and architecture exhibit their maſter-pieces; and, in a word, where the moſt diſtinguiſhed talents are joined to the greateſt lights.

The Auguſtan age abounded with an infinite number of philoſophers and men of letters, who were perfectly well acquainted with nature and arts; who had ſtudied the beſt authors antient and modern, had compared them with each other, and were every day employed in diſcuſſing their particular beauties, not only in public declamations, but in writing likewiſe. Virgil then muſt, doubtleſs, have profited conſiderably from ſuch advantages: this every one is ſenſible of who reads him. There are every where marks of an author who knows the rules, and is apprehenſive of breaking through them; who is inceſſantly retouching, and is under a continual dread of the cenſure of the learned: every where rich, correct, and elegant; his paintings have a coloring no leſs brilliant than juſt: like an experienced artiſt he chuſes to keep cloſe to the ſhore, rather than expoſe himſelf to the violence of a tempeſt. Homer, full of ſecurity, gives himſelf up, fearleſs and without reſtraint, to the impulſe of his genius. He paints all in the ſublime ſtyle, ſometimes at the riſque of tranſgreſſing the bounds of his art: nature alone is his guide; ſhe ſtands all naked and unveiled before his eyes; and in the

poetic portrait he draws of her, he follows, chuſes, embelliſhes and preſerves her in all her luſtre.

The firſt thing Virgil had to do, after undertaking to write an epic poem, was to make choice of a ſubject proper to ſupport the ſuperſtructure; a ſubject bordering upon the fabulous ages, and in itſelf ſomewhat fabulous: ſuch an one as afforded but indiſtinct and half-formed ideas, and conſequently ſo much the more ſuſceptible of the epic fictions. In the ſecond place, it was neceſſary that an intereſting relation ſhould ſubſiſt between this ſubject, and the people for whom it was undertaken. Now we find theſe two requiſites united in full perfection in the arrival of Eneas in Italy. This prince paſſed for the ſon of a goddeſs: his true hiſtory was loſt in fable. Moreover, the Romans pretended he was the original founder of their nation, and father of their firſt kings. Virgil then has made a good choice in taking for his ſubject the ſettling of Eneas in Italy.

To render this circumſtance ſtill more intereſting, the poet, making uſe of the privilege of his art, has introduced ſeveral occaſional ſtrokes of panegyric on the prince and nation, in certain allegorical deſcriptions, where they may eaſily be diſcovered.

But it is not this ſtile of allegory that conſtituted his poem what it is, as we have elſe-

where

where clearly proved; for the Eneid had been no leſs an epic poem, though Auguſtus or the Roman people had never exiſted.

We ſhall therefore conſider the Eneid, not as panegyric, but as a poem only, in the ſame manner as we have already done the Iliad.

The ſubject being pitched upon, and genius having formed and prepared the proper materials, they were next to be aſſembled, ranked, and joined in proper order. We ſhall now ſhew them in the order in which they are given by the author: by this means each paſſage may be conſidered ſeparately and by itſelf, and afterwards compared with thoſe which precede or follow it.

The fable of the Eneid.

Book I. Æneas leaves Sicily; upon which Juno, the declared enemy of the Trojans, immediately raiſes a ſtorm, that drives him aſhore on the coaſt of Africa. Venus, the mother and protectreſs of this hero, complains to Jupiter of the hardſhips her ſon undergoes; Jupiter comforts her, by diſcovering the deſtiny that awaits him, and directly diſpatches Mercury to diſpoſe Dido, who reigned in that place, to give the princely fugitive a favorable reception at her court. Æneas arrives at the palace, concealed by a cloud his mother had ſpread round him; and finding a reception agreeable

to his wiſhes, he ſends for his ſon, together with preſents for the queen: but Venus, deſirous of inſpiring Dido with a paſſion for Æneas, the better to ſecure him from any farther diſagreeable attempts on the part of Juno, cauſes her ſon Cupid to ſupply the place of Aſcanius.

Book II. After a magnificent banquet, Æneas relates his misfortunes, the ſacking of Troy, his own endeavors to repulſe the Greeks, and his being forced at length to fly, with his father, his houſhold gods, and his wife Creuſa; who, wandering from his ſide, was loſt in the ſtreets of Troy on fire.

Book III. Æneas quits the Trojan ſhores; and, at firſt, propoſes ſettling in Thrace; but is warned, by terrifying prodigies, to repair to the country of his anceſtors; by which he ſuppoſes is meant the iſland of Crete; but is obliged to renounce his purpoſe of going thither, by a contagious diſeaſe. After all this he is informed by the gods, that Italy is the place whither he is to go: he paſſes by Actium, where he celebrates games, and arrives at length at Drepanum; from whence he is driven by a ſtorm to Carthage, at which place he makes his narrative.

Book IV. Dido, touched with the merit and misfortunes of Æneas, falls violently in love with him, and endeavors to keep him in Africa; but Mercury is ſent from Jupiter to order him

him to proceed directly for Italy: upon this he leaves Carthage, and Dido kills herſelf in deſpair for his loſs.

Book V. As ſoon as he leaves the port of Carthage, a tempeſt obliges him to land in Sicily, where he celebrates anniverſary games in honor of his father: after which he departs, under the protection of Neptune, and arrives in Italy.

Book VI. His father had declared to him in a dream, that he was to deſcend to the ſhades below, where he was to behold his poſterity. The Cumæan ſybil, interpreteſs of the gods, accompanies him to thoſe regions where ſhe ſhews him the puniſhments of the guilty, and the rewards of the juſt, with all that was believed by the pagans concerning a future ſtate: at length he meets with his father Anchiſes, and, together with him, beholds in review the ſhades of thoſe, who were, in after times, to become names famous in the Roman empire.

Book VII. He advances up the country, and comes to the banks of the Tiber. Latinus, who then reigned in thoſe parts, had an only daughter, whom the oracle had deſtined to a ſtranger: Æneas is choſen for the ſon-in-law; but Juno cauſes Alecto to riſe from hell, and render Latinus's queen furious againſt the marriage. Turnus, who had pretenſions to the young princeſs, is inflamed by the ſame fury; every thing

breathes war; Turnus already begins to call together his friends and allies.

Book VIII. Æneas, on his ſide, counſelled by the god of the Tiber, repairs firſt to Evander, and afterwards to the Tyrians, to ſolicit their aſſiſtance: he receives from Venus a ſuit of celeſtial armor, upon which are repreſented the actions of Auguſtus.

Book IX. During the abſence of Æneas, Juno adviſes Turnus to attack the Trojan camp: this prince attempts to burn their ſhips, which are inſtantly changed into nymphs. The Trojans hold a council among themſelves, on ſending for Æneas back: Niſus and Euryalus take it upon themſelves; they fall in the attempt. Turnus attacks the camp; Pandarus and Bitias on a ſudden throw open the gates, and ſhut them again as ſoon as Turnus is entered: he traverſes the camp, and at laſt throws himſelf into the river, which he ſwims over, and rejoins his army.

Book X. Jupiter calls a council of the gods; but being unable to reconcile Venus and Juno, he declares that he will no longer intermeddle with either Trojans or Rutulans, but leave every thing to fate. Æneas comes back to his camp, meets with his ſhips changed into nymphs, by whom he is acquainted with the danger that threatens his camp: he lands, and joins his people. Pallas, ſon to Evander, is killed

killed the firſt day; to revenge whoſe death, Æneas makes a great ſlaughter of the enemy: Turnus himſelf had nigh periſhed with the reſt, had not Jupiter acquainted Juno of the danger which her favorite was, and permitted her to deceive Turnus, by raiſing a phantom in the likeneſs of Æneas, which ſeemed to fly towards the ſhips; Turnus follows the deluſion, enters one of the veſſels, and is no ſooner on board than Juno cuts the cable, and he is carried by the waves to Ardea, of which place he was king.

Book XI. A ſuſpenſion of arms is agreed upon, in order for burying the dead on both ſides. Latinus calls a council about demanding peace; Turnus oppoſes this violently, and requires a ſingle combat with Æneas. On a ſudden a great cry is heard, and news is brought that Æneas has made an attack in two different places at once: an ambuſcade is laid for him; but the Latins being worſted in the open field, the ambuſh abandon their poſt, and Æneas arrives in the night-time under the walls of the town.

Book XII. The Latins being beaten, and in great conſternation, Turnus forms the reſolution to engage Æneas alone, and hand to hand. An agreement is made, which is as ſoon violated on the ſide of the Latins, from amongſt whom a dart is thrown at Æneas, which

wounds

wounds him: Venus preſently cures the hurt, and the hero flies again to the ſcene of action, calling for Turnus with a loud voice; but that unhappy prince ſtrives to avoid him. Æneas, marching up to the town, begins to ſet fire to the ramparts: the queen, now grown deſperate, lays violent hands on herſelf. At length Turnus is brought to fight; but notwithſtanding the aſſiſtance and ſpecial protection of his ſiſter Juturna, he falls by the ſword of Æneas.

The works of Homer and Virgil are what the Greeks and Latins have of moſt beautiful and perfect in their reſpective languages: they are the ſource, model, and rule of good taſte, as we have already obſerved in ſpeaking of the former of theſe authors; and taſte is avowedly the ſovereign legiſlator in matters of literature: for this reaſon every man of letters ſhould be perfectly well read in the works of theſe two excellent poets.

They have both ſomewhat divine in their manner of expreſſion; nothing can be better delivered, or with greater force, energy, dignity, harmony, and preciſion, than what they have done: ſo that, inſtead of making any compariſon between them in this point, we ſhall adopt the thought of the young Cyrus, who ſaid, His grandfather was the handſomeſt man among the Medes, and his father the handſomeſt man among the Perſians.

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But it is not ſo with the fables of theſe two poems: they very readily admit of a compariſon. Let us then examine candidly, and without preposſeſſion, in what the one ſurpaſſes the other: the buſineſs here is not to criticiſe, but to form our ideas of each in as clear and juſt a manner as we poſſibly can. And before I go any farther I take leave to declare, that no one can be more charmed with Virgil than myſelf; that his verſe, his turns, his deſcriptions, afford me inexpreſſible pleaſure through the whole of the reading. This premiſed, what follows is to be regarded as the ſentiments of one who is a ſtrict obſerver, without being either the caviller or detractor.

I. Obſervation. Homer has evidently the ſuperiority of genius over the Latin poet: for, beſides being poſſeſſed of a ſufficient ſtock of ideas all his own, capable of ſupplying matter for two poems, each of a very great length, he has likewiſe had the ſecret of forming by far the longeſt of theſe two poems, on a ſubject in itſelf the moſt inſignificant and confined that perhaps ever was: it is merely the quarrel of two princes about a female ſlave. Virgil, on the contrary, in order to fill his piece, ſeems to have been obliged to make his hero a traveller, lover, law-giver, and warrior: he makes him give long narrations of paſſed events; he even cauſes him to deſcend into hell itſelf: what would he have had to ſay, had his matter been con-

confined to the ſingle circumſtance of the war with Turnus? Homer draws all his matter directly from the quarrel of Agamemnon; from this ſimple ſingle circumſtance ariſes the whole of his production: nothing in it is foreign to the original propoſition; no narrations, no lofty miſplaced deſcriptions: the work itſelf is all of a piece, and of the ſame nature from beginning to end.

II. Obſervation. Virgil employs the marvellous as well as Homer has done; but he has not, like him, the happy method of connecting it through the whole, and conciliating its operations with thoſe of the natural agents. Juno is the obſtacle to the Trojan hero: but is the ſupernatural force which is oppoſed on the other ſide of ſufficient weight to ſurmount this obſtacle? Venus does nothing but weep at Jupiter's feet; Jupiter does nothing more for her, but acquaint her with her ſon's future deſtiny. This divinity, the moſt powerful of all the gods, is, in the Latin poet, a deity without either vigor or action; a kind of *automaton*: he neither gives himſelf the trouble of reflecting which party has juſtice on its ſide or which not, but declares very coolly,

Tros Rutuluſve fuat nullo diſcrimine habebo.

In Homer, he ſees, acts, rewards, puniſhes, and appears, through all, the omnipotent ſovereign,

vereign. He decrees that Troy ſhall periſh for the perjury of Laomedon, and the rape committed by Paris: he decrees that Achilles ſhall be avenged, becauſe Agamemnon had cruelly inſulted him.—The miniſtry of the gods is poor and cold in Virgil; in Homer, it is ſtrong and full of fire.

III. Obſervation. Nothing of importance ſhould go forward in an epic poem, without the intervention of ſome divinity. Virgil himſelf teaches us this, by his ſtriving ſo induſtriouſly to bring his gods in on every occaſion: but then how comes it, that the firſt ſtorm is the effect of Juno's wrath; and that the ſecond, in the fifth book, is merely the effect of chance? Is it becauſe the painter had exhauſted his whole ſtock of ſtrokes and colors, and could no longer ſupply the marvellous? Why do we ſee Æneas left wholly to himſelf in almoſt every battle? Why has he not ſome god to direct and ſtrengthen him? Should not the greateſt part of his deſigns ariſe from ſome divine inſpiration? This is reckoned one of the beauties of an epic poem, where-ever it occurs: it muſt certainly then be owing to a defect in the genius and power of the artiſt, where it is wanting.

IV. Obſervation. We meet with ſo many incidents in the courſe of the Æneid, which have no ſort of relation to the eſtabliſhment of Æneas in Italy, that the mind of the reader is

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conſequently very little intereſted in this poem, which ſeems more affecting in its parts taken ſeparately, than in the aggregate.—In Homer, one paſſage ſeems to beſpeak another; the reader is anxious to proceed: but with Virgil, there are, in ſome places, ſuch a ſtop, ſuch a dead reſt in the action, that the reader would with all his heart ſtay there: as at Carthage, for inſtance, after the death of Dido, one does not much care whether we follow Æneas into Italy or not. Hitherto there has been little ſeen in him, but an amorous hero, and one who has been wandering about for ſeven long years from ſea to ſea; and we can ſcarce bring ourſelves to think, that ſuch a character is capable of any great exploits, when he comes to raiſe himſelf a ſtate.

V. Obſervation. There are ſeveral circumſtances in the character of Æneas, which cools our ardor for him. How came he alone to eſcape out of Troy, while every other Trojan periſhed? He muſt have been very fortunate! How comes his wife Creuſa to be loſt in the ſtreets? Again, do his pretenſions to the daughter of Latinus ſeem to be the moſt clear imaginable? Are they ſufficient to occaſion the death of ſo brave a prince as Turnus appears to be; and whoſe pretenſions were, doubtleſs, more natural than the other's? I know very well that there are anſwers to all theſe objections; but I know

know, at the ſame time, that they will not remove the diſagreeable impreſſions made on the mind of the reader; a concluſion evidently to the diſadvantage of the poet. Homer's heroes give us impreſſions that are liable to no contradiction: we love Hector ſincerely, and without regret. Achilles has every where the ſame open, frank method of procedure; he is proud and haughty, but always good: he has juſtice on his ſide; and if he does ſometimes carry his paſſion to too great a length, the reader forgives it in him, from a ſelf-conviction that human nature will run into ſuch exceſſes. Homer has the art to make all his characters beloved, without the eſteem we have for one, injuring any of the reſt: he endeavors to make us love Achilles; and at the ſame time has the ſkill to make us love Hector likewiſe, though his rival. Virgil keeps up a cold, dry regard for Æneas, but reſerves all the affecting and the intereſting for his enemy Turnus: we do not hate Æneas indeed, but that is not enough, we ſhould be made to love him, and love him with tenderneſs. The few ſtrokes of humanity that now and then occur in his ſpeeches, as, for inſtance, when he declares he would willingly ſave the whole Latin nation, though his foes, do not come up to the ſtriking proof of action; it is this that ſinks into the heart, and effectually rouſes

rouſes its attention; while ſentiments, confined to phraſe, do but juſt glance upon the ſurface.

VI. Obſervation. But to be more circumſtantial. When Mercury is ſent to Carthage, to inſpire Dido with tender ſentiments, one would think that god ſhould not content himſelf with barely arriving at the city, without ſpeaking to the queen; which was the only probable means of diſpoſing her mind. When gods act in a poem, they ſhould act in the ſame manner as men, whoſe form they wear: now we all know that men ſpeak, when they intend to inſpire others with certain ſentiments; but here Mercury comes to the place, and ſays nothing at all.

VII. Obſervation. The relation of the ſacking of Troy is extremely well placed, and as judiciouſly introduced: but who can forgive Æneas for carrying off his houſhold-gods, his father, and his ſon, and telling his wife to follow at a diſtance, *longè veſtigia ſerves*; it ſeems done with a deſign to loſe her. Was it not more than probable ſhe would have almoſt died with fright, even though Æneas had held her by the hand? And yet ſhe is left to wander alone, and in the night-time, in the ſtreets of a town given up to flames and rapine! But the truth of the matter is, that Virgil wanted to get rid of Creuſa, to bring about another marriage in Italy; this is palpable: and notwithſtanding the gloſs

gloſs he endeavors to put upon this deſertion of Creuſa, the artifice appears very plain. Nature would never have diſpoſed things in this manner.

VIII. Obſervation. When the gods had intereſted themſelves in directing his flight, what occaſion was there for thoſe equivocal and miſinterpreted oracles, which ſent him firſt to Thrace, and then to Crete? Why not abide by the oracle he had received from Creuſa, who had plainly named to him the Heſperian coaſt, where Tyber rolled its waves? The whole machinery here ſeems to move very heavily.

IX. Obſervation. For what reaſon does Æneas, in paſſing by Actium, ſtop on a ſudden to celebrate certain games? What connection is there between him and that place? It is true it became famous afterwards by the victory gained there by Auguſtus; but as for Æneas, he had at that time no ſort of reaſon to diſtinguiſh it from any other place, by particularly chuſing it for the exhibiting of his ſhews. The panegyriſt and flatterer appear too bare-faced here.

X. Obſervation. Æneas, who is on every occaſion propoſed as a model of wiſdom, humanity, goodneſs, equity, &c. ſhould he help to increaſe the paſſion of Dido, by ſeeming to meet it with an equal flame, only to leave that wretched princeſs, at laſt, a victim to the deſpair of diſappointed love? If Carthage hated Rome,

Rome, in virtue of the hatred of its firſt foundreſs, Carthage had juſtice in its hatred; and Rome was the aggreſſor, in the perſon of him to whom ſhe owed her foundation.

XI. Obſervation. For what purpoſe have we the ſtorm raiſed in the fifth book? Only to go to Sicily, and celebrate the funeral games. Theſe games form a beautiful ſcene, which muſt come in ſomewhere. Homer places his after all the combats are over, *longorum operum finis*; and in the moſt natural place for them, after the death of Patroclus: he has, beſides, the addreſs to ſhew us all the Grecian heroes we have ſeen before, in the courſe of his poem, engaged now with each other; by which means he has an opportunity of diſtinguiſhing the exact degree of courage in each, and, conſequently, of fixing the rank they are to hold in our eſteem. But then this is not to celebrate an anniverſary, but to pay honors to the funeral of a deceaſed hero. How comes it Æneas had not celebrated his rites the foregoing year, at the time ſet apart for the obſequies? But he thinks himſelf of it a year afterwards. Beſides all this, of what ſignification is it to ſhew us characters that we know nothing of, and who are not to make their appearance again in the whole poem, or elſe in a different kind to that in which we then ſee them? In ſhort, Virgil's heroes have done nothing

thing hitherto, but been a little weather-beaten; and now they ſet out with games.

XII. Obſervation. The oracle of Faunus is introduced to add ſome degree of authority to Æneas, and to inveſt him with imaginary rights: Virgil might as well have ſaid, This is ſo, becauſe the gods will have it ſo: but when we come to conſider, that to this will of the gods is linked the neceſſity of the author and his poem; and that, without it, he could not attain his end, we ſhall be apt to diſtruſt the firſt reaſon, and begin to ſuſpect that this is the will of the gods, only becauſe the poet had interceded with them that it might be ſo.

XIII. Obſervation. On what account does the god of the Tyber, all on a ſudden, intereſt himſelf ſo ſtrongly in behalf of Æneas, rather than of Turnus? I ſhould be glad to find any plauſible reaſon for this; perſonages that interfere in an affair without ſome evident intereſt, are inſipid, and even troubleſome.

XIV. Why ſhould Æneas go in perſon to ſolicit ſuccours? There was an apparent neceſſity for his being abſent from the ſcene of action, as well as Achilles, that he might at his return ſhew his ſuperiority over Turnus, againſt whom none of all the other Trojans were able to make head during his abſence: but this abſence is an act of imprudence. What god had aſſured him that his camp would not be fired? If Tur-

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nus had carried his point, as he did not, what would Æneas and his auxiliaries have done at their arrival? Achilles withdraws himſelf, it is true; but then he is all the time within reach of defending the ſhips, ſhould Hector puſh his ſucceſs too far; which happens, and he then does defend them.

XV. Obſervation. Venus brings Æneas a ſuit of celeſtial armor. Are we then to ſuppoſe him to have been without arms, in ſo many combats as he had been engaged in? Thetis brings armor to Achilles; but Achilles was in want of arms: he had lent his to Patroclus, and Patroclus had yielded them, with his life, to the conquering hand of Hector. But Virgil ſeeks the ſatisfaction of deſcribing the glories of Auguſtus.

XVI. Obſervation. Jupiter does no one thing in favor of Æneas: either this hero had juſtice on his ſide, or he had not: if the former, he was intitled to Jupiter's protection, and he ſhould have aſſiſted him: if in the wrong, then ſhould Jupiter have oppoſed him, and not have ſuffered every thing to proceed by blind fatality. Is it thus the poet endeavors to make the panegyric of Auguſtus, who is pretended to be deſcribed in the perſon of Æneas? Father Boſſu would perſuade us, that Virgil all along intends to prove allegorically, that Auguſtus was befriended of the gods; and for that reaſon

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all his enemies ought to ſubmit to him, or expect to be overwhelmed by the divine diſpleaſure: and yet we find Jupiter declaring, I am for neither of the parties; I leave all to deſtiny: what glory does this reflect upon Auguſtus? What leſſon does it furniſh to his enemies?

XVII. Obſervation. I have paſſed over the epiſode of Niſus and Euryalus: nothing can be better deſcribed, nothing is more affecting: but on the whole, the enterprize is badly concerted, and as badly conducted; and accordingly meets with the ſucceſs it merits. What a difference between this, and the ſame circumſtance in Homer? The valiant Diomed undertakes to diſcover what the Trojans are doing; he deſires a companion; he makes choice of one, which is the prudent Ulyſſes, with whom he could with confidence paſs through oppoſing flames. I am ſenſible, that in the former caſe, the unhappy event of the expedition increaſes our ſolicitude about the Trojan camp; but then this ſolicitude, to be agreeable, ſhould have had ſome other foundation than that of the imprudence of thoſe for whom we find ourſelves concerned.

XVIII. Obſervation. What can be more extravagant than the thought, I will not ſay of turning the ſhips into nymphs, for it is the cuſtom of poets to make uſe of theſe kinds of metamorphoſis in their epic pieces; but the groſs abuſe of the liberty of fiction, in making

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theſe nymphs go to meet their maſter, and acquaint him with what had paſſed in his abſence? Had not Turnus ſet fire to theſe ſhips, Æneas would have arrived without knowing what had paſſed in his camp. Beſides, and this is is one of the firſt rules in this kind of writing, whenever the gods are introduced, it ſhould be in human form; and they ſhould act and ſpeak as mortals: and if at any time they diſcover themſelves, it ought to be only at the inſtant of parting, and by way of giving a greater weight and authority to what they have been ſaying: but theſe nymphs appeared as nymphs, ſwimming about the veſſel in which Æneas was, and reſting with one hand upon its ſide: now this is exhibiting the marvellous in too glaring a manner; it is no leſs than a miracle.

XIX. Obſervation. Turnus is aſſiſted by Juno, in whoſe room his ſiſter Juturna acts: as for Æneas, he has no ſingle divinity to accompany him; Venus cures him indeed, but not till after having firſt ſuffered him to be wounded.

XX. Obſervation. In fine, Æneas appears all along to have too much the advantage over Turnus. Achilles had his divine armor, but ſo had Hector likewiſe, in thoſe he had gained from Patroclus. Turnus is diſordered; he is ſtruck with dread at the appearance of a flight of birds of ill omen: in ſhort, he is rather ſlain than conquered

conquered by Æneas, and falls by the irreſiſtible power of fate. It is to be wiſhed that Æneas appeared in a more exalted light in this laſt combat, by meeting with a more vigorous reſiſtance on the part of his enemy.

But, after all, the beauties of Virgil muſt be very ſtriking; ſince, with all his faults, he yet holds the ballance nearly equal with Homer. Homer is divine, as to the invention of his poem, the diſpoſition of his parts, and the elocution of his ſtile; but then he ſometimes falls into tedious details, long-winded ſtories, or matters which are too low, have too much fameneſs, and betray a want of choice. Virgil has, in his work, avoided theſe little defects; and by that means has concealed its more glaring faults, rather chuſing to remain on this ſide perfection, than to overſhoot the mark:

Magis offendit nimiùm quam parùm.

Cic. De Orat.

MILTON.

THIS poet derived his deſcent from a family and town of his name in Oxfordſhire. He was born in London, in the year 1608, and died in 1674.

The Paradiſe Loſt of this author, is looked upon, by the beſt judges, as the greateſt per-

formance, or, at leaſt, the nobleſt work of genius, in the Engliſh language.

The works of inferior geniuſſes have their infancy, and often acquire additions of ſtrength and beauty from the ſeveral retouches they receive from their authors, in the courſe of different impreſſions; but this poem came into the world, like the firſt pair it celebrates, in a ſtate of maturity.

It was a matter of controverſy ſome years ſince, whether Milton's Paradiſe Loſt may be called an heroic poem? I ſhall wave the diſcuſſion of this point, as it will be ſufficient in its perfection, if it has in it all the beauties of the higheſt kind of poetry; and, as for thoſe who alledge it is not an heroic poem, they advance no more to the diminution of it, than if they ſhould ſay Adam is not Æneas, nor Eve Helen.

I ſhall therefore examine it by the rules of epic poetry, and ſee whether it falls ſhort of the Iliad or Æneid, in the beauties which are eſſential to that kind of writing. The firſt thing to be conſidered in an epic poem, is the fable, which is perfect or imperfect, according as the action which it relates is more or leſs ſo. This action ſhould have three qualifications in it. Firſt, it ſhould be but one action. Secondly, it ſhould be an entire action. And thirdly, it ſhould be a great action. To conſider the action of the Iliad, Æneid, and Paradiſe Loſt,

Loſt, in theſe three ſeveral lights. Homer, to preſerve the unity of his action, haſtens into the midſt of things; and opens his poem with the diſcord of his princes, artfully interweaving in the ſeveral ſucceeding parts of it, an account of every thing material which relates to them, and had paſſed before this fatal diſſenſion. After the ſame manner, Æneas makes his firſt appearance in the Tyrrhene ſeas, and within the ſight of Italy, becauſe the action, propoſed to be ſetlebrated, was that of his ſettling himſelf in Latium. But becauſe it was neceſſary for the reader to know what had happened to him in the taking of Troy, and in the preceding parts of his voyage, Virgil makes his hero relate it by way of epiſode in the ſecond and third books of the Æneid: the contents of both which books come before thoſe of the firſt book in the thread of the ſtory, though, for preſerving of this unity of action, they follow it in the diſpoſition of the poem. Milton, in imitation of theſe two great poets, opens his Paradiſe Loſt with an infernal council plotting the fall of man; which is the action he propoſed to celebrate; and as for thoſe great actions, the battle of the angels, and the creation of the world, (which preceded in point of time, and which, in my opinion, would have entirely deſtroyed the unity of his principal action, had he related them in the ſame order that they happened)

he caſt them into the fifth, ſixth and ſeventh books, by way of epiſode to this noble poem.

The ſecond qualification required in the action of an epic poem is, that it ſhould be an entire action: an action is entire when it is complete in all its parts; or, as Ariſtotle deſcribes it, when it conſiſts of a beginning, a middle, and an end. Nothing ſhould go before it, be intermix'd with it, or follow after it, that is not related to it. As, on the contrary, no ſingle ſtep ſhould be omitted in that juſt and regular progreſs which it muſt be ſuppoſed to take from its original to its conſummation. Thus we ſee the anger of Achilles in his birth, its continuance, and effects, and Æneas's ſettlement in Italy, carried on through all the oppoſitions in his way to it both by ſea and land. The action in Milton excels, I think, both the former in this particular; we ſee it contrived in hell, executed upon earth, and puniſhed by heaven. The parts of it are told in the moſt diſtinct manner, and grow out of one another in the moſt natural order.

The third qualification of an epic poem is its greatneſs. The anger of Achilles was of ſuch conſequence, that it embroiled the kings of Greece, deſtroyed the heroes of Aſia, and engaged all the gods in factions. Æneas's ſettlement in Italy produced the Cæſars, and gave birth to the Roman empire. Milton's ſubject

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was ſtill greater than either of the former; it does not determine the fate of ſingle perſons or nations, but of a whole ſpecies. The united powers of hell are joined together for the deſtruction of mankind, which they effected in part, and would have completed, had not Omnipotence itſelf interpoſed. The principal actors are man in his greateſt perfection, and woman in her higheſt beauty. Their enemies are the fallen angels: the Meſſiah their friend, and the Almighty their protector. In ſhort, every thing that is great in the whole circle of being, whether within the verge of nature, or out of it, has a proper part aſſigned it in this admirable poem.

In poetry, as in architecture, not only the whole, but the principal members, and every part of them, ſhould be great. I will not preſume to ſay, that the book of the games in the Æneid, or that in the Iliad, are not of this nature, nor to reprehend Virgil's ſimile of the top, and many other of the ſame kind in the Iliad, as liable to any cenſure in this particular; but I think we may ſay, without derogating from thoſe wonderful performances, that there is an indiſputable and unqueſtioned magnificence in every part of Paradiſe Loſt, and indeed a much greater than could have been formed upon any pagan ſyſtem.

Having examined the action of Paradiſe Loſt, let us, in the next place, conſider the actors.

Homer has excelled all the heroic poets that ever wrote, in the multitude and variety of his characters. Every god, that is admitted into his poem, acts a part which would have been ſuitable to no other deity. His princes are as much diſtinguiſhed by their manners as by their dominions; and even thoſe among them, whoſe characters ſeem wholly made up of courage, differ from one another as to the particular kinds of courage in which they excel. In ſhort, there is ſcarce a ſpeech or action in the Iliad, which the reader may not aſcribe to the perſon that ſpeaks or acts, without ſeeing his name at the head of it.

Homer does not only out-ſhine all other poets in the variety, but alſo in the novelty, of his characters. He has introduced among his Grecian princes a perſon, who had lived in three ages of men, and converſed with Theſeus, Hercules, Polyphemus, and the firſt race of heroes. His principal actor is the ſon of a goddeſs, not to mention the offspring of other deities, who have likewiſe a place in his poem, and the venerable Trojan prince, who was the father of ſo many kings and heroes. There is in theſe ſeveral characters of Homer, a certain dignity as well as novelty, which adapts them in a more peculiar manner to the nature of an heroic poem.

poem. Though, at the ſame time, to give them the greater variety, he has deſcribed a Vulcan, that is, a buffoon among his gods, and a Therſites among his mortals.

Virgil falls infinitely ſhort of Homer in the characters of his poem, both as to their variety and novelty. Æneas is indeed a perfect character; but as for Achates, though he is ſtiled the heroe's friend, he does nothing in the whole poem which may deſerve that title. Gyas, Mneſtheus, Sergeſtus, and Cloanthus, are all men of the ſame ſtamp and character.

—— fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthum.
VIRG.

There are indeed ſeveral very natural incidents in the part of Aſcanius; as that of Dido cannot be ſufficiently admired. I do not ſee any thing new or particular in Turnus. Pallas and Evander are remote copies of Hector and Priam, as Lauſus and Mezentius are almoſt parallels to Pallas and Evander. The characters of Niſus and Eurialus are beautiful, but common. We muſt not forget the parts of Sinon, Camilla, and ſome few others, which are fine improvements on the Greek poet. In ſhort, there is neither that variety nor novelty in the perſons of the Æneid, which we meet with in thoſe of the Iliad.

If we look into the characters of Milton, we ſhall find that he has introduced all the variety his fable was capable of receiving. The whole ſpecies of mankind was in two perſons at the time to which the ſubject of his poem is confined. We have, however, four diſtinct characters in theſe two perſons. We ſee man and woman in the higheſt innocence and perfection, and in the moſt abject ſtate of guilt and infirmity. The two laſt characters are, indeed, very common and obvious, but the two firſt are not only more magnificent, but more new, than any characters either in Virgil or Homer, or indeed in the whole circle of nature.

Milton was ſo ſenſible of this defect in the ſubject of his poem, and of the few characters it would afford him, that he has brought into it two actors of a ſhadowy and fictitious nature, in the perſons of Sin and Death; by which means he has wrought into the body of his fable a very beautiful and well-invented allegory. But notwithſtanding the fineneſs of this allegory may atone for it in ſome meaſure, I cannot think, that perſons of ſuch a chimerical exiſtence are proper actors in an epic poem; becauſe there is not that meaſure of probability annexed to them, which is requiſite in writings of this kind.

Another principal actor in this poem is the great enemy of mankind. The part of Ulyſſes

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in Homer's Odyſſey is very much admired by Ariſtotle, as perplexing that fable with very agreeable plots and intricacies, not only by the many adventures in his voyage, and the ſubtilty of his behaviour, but by the various concealments and diſcoveries of his perſon in ſeveral parts of that poem. But the crafty being I have now mentioned, makes a much longer voyage than Ulyſſes, puts in practice many more wiles and ſtratagems, and hides himſelf under a greater variety of ſhapes and appearances; all of which are ſeverally detected, to the great delight and ſurprize of the reader.

There is another circumſtance in the principal actors of the Iliad and Æneid, which gives a peculiar beauty to thoſe two poems, and was therefore contrived with very great judgment. I mean the authors having choſen for their heroes perſons who were ſo nearly related to the people for whom they wrote. Achilles was a Greek, and Æneas the remote founder of Rome. By this means their countrymen (whom they principally propoſed to themſelves for their readers) were particularly attentive to all the parts of their ſtory, and ſympathized with their heroes in all their adventures. A Roman could not but rejoice in the eſcapes, ſucceſſes, and victories of Æneas, and be grieved at any defeats, misfortunes, or diſappointments that befel him; as a Greek muſt have had the ſame regard for A-

chilles. And it is plain, that each of thoſe poems have loſt this great advantage, among thoſe readers to whom their heroes are as ſtrangers, or indifferent perſons.

Milton's poem is admirable in this reſpect; ſince it is impoſſible for any of its readers, whatever nation, country, or people he may belong to, not to be related to the perſons who are the principal actors in it; but what is ſtill infinitely more to its advantage, the principal actors in this poem are not only our progenitors, but our repreſentatives. We have an actual intereſt in every thing they do, and no leſs than our utmoſt happineſs is concerned, and lies at ſtake in all their behaviour.

Having taken a general ſurvey of the fable and characters in Milton's Paradiſe Loſt; the parts which remain to be conſidered are, the ſentiments, and the language.

The ſentiments in an epic poem are the thoughts and behaviour which the author aſcribes to the perſons whom he introduces, and are juſt when they are conformable to the characters of the ſeveral perſons. The ſentiments have likewiſe a relation to things as well as perſons, and are then perfect when they are ſuch as are adapted to the ſubject.

Nor is it ſufficient for an epic poem to be filled with ſuch thoughts as are natural, unleſs it abound alſo with ſuch as are ſublime.

Mi ton's

Milton's chief talent, and indeed his diſtinguiſhing excellence, lies in the ſublimity of his thoughts. There are others of the moderns who rival him in every other part of poetry; but in the greatneſs of his ſentiments he triumphs over all the poets both modern and ancient, Homer only excepted. It is impoſſible for the imagination of man to diſtend itſelf with greater ideas, than thoſe which he has laid together in his firſt, ſecond and ſixth books. The ſeventh, which deſcribes the creation of the world, is likewiſe wonderfully ſublime, though not ſo apt to ſtir up emotion in the mind of the reader, nor conſequently ſo perfect in the epic way of writing, becauſe it is filled with leſs action. Let the judicious reader compare what Longinus has obſerved on ſeveral paſſages of Homer, and he will find parallels from moſt of them in the Paradiſe Loſt.

From what has been ſaid, we may infer, that as there are two kinds of ſentiments, the natural, and the ſublime, which are always to be purſued in an heroic poem, there are alſo two kinds of thoughts, which are carefully to be avoided. The firſt are ſuch as are affected and unnatural; the ſecond ſuch as are mean and vulgar. As for the firſt kind of thoughts we meet with little or nothing that is like them in Virgil. Every thing is juſt and natural. His ſentiments ſhew that he had a perfect inſight into human nature, and

that

that he knew every thing which was the moſt proper to affect it.

Mr. Dryden has in ſome places, which I may hereafter take notice of, miſrepreſented Virgil's way of thinking as to this particular, in the tranſlation he has given us of the Æneid. I do not remember that Homer any where falls into the faults above-mentioned, which were indeed the falſe refinements of later ages: Milton, it muſt be confeſt, has ſometimes erred in this reſpect, though conſidering all the poets of the age in which he writ, were infected with this wrong way of thinking, he is rather to be admired that he did not give more into it, than that he did ſometimes comply with the vicious taſte which ſtill prevails ſo much among modern writers.

But ſince ſeveral thoughts may be natural which are low and groveling, an epic poet ſhould not only avoid ſuch ſentiments as are unnatural or affected, but alſo ſuch as are mean and vulgar.

Milton is very little faulty on this head; the moſt exceptionable paſſage of this kind in the whole poem, is where the evil ſpirits are deſcribed as rallying the angels upon the ſucceſs of their new-invented artillery, which is indeed nothing elſe but a ſtring of puns, and thoſe too very indifferent.

—— Satan beheld their plight,
And to his mates thus in deriſion call'd.
O Friends,

O Friends, why come not on theſe victors proud!
Ere while they fierce were coming, and when we,
To entertain them fair with *open front*,
And breaſt (what could we more) propounded terms
Of *compoſition*; ſtraight they changed their minds,
Flew off, and into ſtrange vagaries fell,
As they would dance, yet for a dance they ſeem'd
Somewhat extravagant and wild, &c.

Having treated of the fable, the characters, and ſentiments in the Paradiſe Loſt, we are, in the laſt place, to conſider the language; and as the learned world is very much divided upon Milton as to this point, I hope they will excuſe me if I appear particular in any of my opinions, and incline to thoſe who judge the moſt advantageouſly of the author.

It is requiſite that the language of an heroic poem ſhould be both perſpicuous and ſublime. In proportion as either of theſe two qualities are wanting, the language is imperfect. Perſpicuity is the firſt and moſt neceſſary qualification; inſomuch that a good-natured reader ſometimes overlooks a little ſlip even in the grammar or ſyntax, where it is impoſſible for him to miſtake the poet's ſenſe. Of this kind is that paſſage in Milton, wherein he ſpeaks of Satan.

—— God and his ſon except,
Created thing nought valu'd he nor ſhunn'd.

And that in which he deſcribes Adam and Eve.

Adam

Adam the goodlieſt man of men ſince born
His ſons, the faireſt of her daughters Eve.

It is plain, that in the former of theſe paſſages, according to the natural ſyntax, the divine perſons mentioned in the firſt line are repreſented as created beings; and that in the other, Adam and Eve are confounded with their ſons and daughters. Such little blemiſhes as theſe, when the thought is great and natural, we ſhould, with Horace, impute to a pardonable inadvertency, or to the weakneſs of human nature, which cannot attend to each minute particular, and give the laſt finiſhing to every circumſtance in ſo long a work. The ancient critics, therefore, who were actuated by a ſpirit of candour, rather than that of cavilling, invented certain figures of ſpeech, on purpoſe to palliate little errors of this nature in the writings of thoſe authors who had ſo many greater beauties to atone for them.

If clearneſs and perſpicuity were only to be conſulted, the poet would have nothing elſe to do but to cloath his thoughts in the moſt plain and natural expreſſions. But ſince it often happens, that the moſt obvious phraſes, and thoſe which are uſed in ordinary converſation, become too familiar to the ear, and contract a kind of meanneſs by paſſing through the mouths of the vulgar, a poet ſhould take particular care

care to guard himſelf againſt idiomatic ways of ſpeaking. Milton has but a few failings in this kind, of which, however, you may meet with ſome inſtances, as in the following paſſages:

——Awhile diſcourſe they hold;
No fear leſt dinner cool; when thus began
Our author——
——feeling
The evil on them brought by me, will curſe
My head, ill fare our anceſtor impure,
For this we may thank Adam——

It is not therefore ſufficient, that the language of an epic poem be perſpicuous, unleſs it be alſo ſublime. To this end it ought to deviate from the common forms and ordinary phraſes of ſpeech. The judgment of a poet very much diſcovers itſelf in ſhunning the common roads of expreſſion, without falling into ſuch ways of ſpeech as may ſeem ſtiff and unnatural; he muſt not ſwell into a falſe ſublime, by endeavouring to avoid the other extreme.

Ariſtotle has obſerved, that the idiomatic ſtile may be avoided, and the ſublime formed, by the following methods. Firſt, by the uſe of metaphors: Thoſe in Milton are very bold but juſt, and I muſt likewiſe obſerve, that they are not thick ſown, which always ſavours too much of wit; that they never claſh with one another, which, as Ariſtotle obſerves, turns a ſentence into a kind of enigma or riddle; and that he ſeldom

dom has recourſe to them where the proper and natural words will do as well.

Another way of raiſing the language and giving it a poetical turn, is to make uſe of the idioms of other tongues. Milton, in conformity with the practice of the ancient poets, and with Ariſtotle's rule, has infuſed a great many Latiniſms as well as Græciſms, and ſometimes Hebraiſms, into the language of his poem, as palpable, obſcure, vaſt, abrupt, and many others.

The third method mentioned by Ariſtotle, is what agrees with the genius of the Greek language more than with that of any other tongue, and is therefore more uſed by Homer than by any other poet. I mean, the lengthning of a phraſe by the addition of words, which may either be inſerted or omitted, as alſo by the extending or contracting of particular words, by the inſertion or omiſſion of certain ſyllables. Milton has put in practice this method of raiſing his language, as far as the nature of our tongue will permit.

I muſt likewiſe take notice, that there are in Milton ſeveral words of his own coining, as cerberean, miſcreated, hell-doom'd, embryon atoms, and many others. If the reader is offended at this liberty in our Engliſh poet, I would recommend him to a diſcourſe in Plutarch, which ſhews us how frequently Homer has made uſe of the ſame liberty.

Milton

Milton by the above-mentioned helps, and by the choice of the nobleſt words and phraſes which our tongue would afford him, has carried our language to a greater height than any of the Engliſh poets have ever done before or after him, and made the ſublimity of his ſtile equal to that of his ſentiments.

I have been the more particular in theſe obſervations on Milton's ſtile, becauſe it is that part of him in which he appears the moſt ſingular. The remarks I have here made upon the practice of other poets, with my obſervations out of Ariſtotle, will perhaps alleviate the prejudice which ſome have taken to his poem upon this account; tho' after all, I muſt confeſs, that I think his ſtile, tho' admirable in general, is in ſome places too much ſtiffened and obſcured by the frequent uſe of thoſe methods, which Ariſtotle has preſcribed for the raiſing of it.

I ſhould, under this head of the language, conſider Milton's numbers, and the meaſure of his verſe: in the former of theſe he has made uſe of ſeveral eliſions that are not cuſtomary among other Engliſh poets, as may be particularly obſerved in his cutting off the letter *y* when it precedes a vowel.

His meaſure is Engliſh heroic verſe without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin. Rhyme being no neceſſary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verſe; in larger

deavoured to cure it by ſeveral expedients; par-
larger works eſpecially, but the invention of a
barbarous age, to ſet of wretched matter and
lame metre. This neglect then of rhyme is ſo
little to be taken for a defect, that it is rather to
be eſteemed an example (and the firſt we have in
Engliſh) of antient liberty recovered to heroic
poem, from the troubleſome and modern bon-
dage of rhyme.

I ſhall cloſe this head with obſerving, that Milton has copied after Homer rather than Virgil in the length of his periods, and the running of his verſes into one another.

Having now conſidered the Paradiſe Loſt under theſe four great heads, the fable, the characters, the ſentiments, and the language; and having ſhewn that Milton excels in general under each of theſe heads, I ſhall next proceed to ſhew the ſeveral defects which appear in each of theſe, not doubting but the reader will pardon me, if I alledge at the ſame time whatever may be ſaid for the extenuation of ſuch defects; and as I enter upon it as on a very ungrateful work, I ſhall but juſt point out the imperfections without endeavouring to inflame them by ridicule. For whatever real faults may be found in this author, theſe, in all reaſon and equity, are to be excuſed, in return for his innumerable beauties, and I muſt obſerve with Longinus, that the pro-

productions of a great genius, with many lapſes and inadvertencies, are infinitely preferable to the works of an inferior kind of author, which are ſcrupulouſly exact, and conformable to all the rules of correct writing. But to return from my digreſſion.

The firſt imperfection which I ſhall obſerve in the fable is, that the event of it is unhappy. The fable of every poem is, according to Ariſtotle's diviſion, either ſimple or implex. It is called ſimple when there is no change of fortune in it, implex when the fortune of the chief actor changes from bad to good, or from good to bad. The implex fable is thought the moſt perfect; I ſuppoſe, becauſe it is more proper to ſtir up the paſſions of the reader, and to ſurprize him with a greater variety of accidents.

The implex fable is therefore of two kinds: in the firſt the chief actor makes his way through a long ſeries of dangers and difficulties, till he arrives at honor and proſperity, as we ſee in the ſtory of Ulyſſes. In the ſecond, the chief actor in the poem falls from ſome eminent pitch of honor and proſperity, into miſery and diſgrace. Thus we ſee Adam and Eve ſinking from a ſtate of innocence and happineſs, into the moſt abject condition of ſin and ſorrow.

Milton ſeems to have been ſenſible of this imperfection in his fable, and has therefore endeavoured

ticularly by the mortification which the great adverſary of mankind meets with upon his return to the aſſembly of infernal ſpirits, as it is deſcribed in a beautiful paſſage of the tenth book; and likewiſe by the viſion wherein Adam, at the cloſe of the poem, ſees his offspring triumphing over his great enemy, and himſelf reſtored to a happier paradiſe than that from which he fell.

There is another objection againſt Milton's fable, which is indeed almoſt the ſame with the former, though placed in a different light, namely, that the hero in Paradiſe Loſt is unſucceſsful, and by no means a match for his enemies. This gave occaſion to Mr. Dryden's reflection, and which we find adopted likewiſe Batteux in the foregoing part of this work, that the Devil was in reality Milton's hero. I think this objection has been fully obviated. The Paradiſe Loſt is an epic, or a narrative poem, and he that looks for an hero in it, ſearches for that which Milton never intended; but if he will needs fix the name of a hero upon any perſon in it, 'tis certainly the Meſſiah who is the hero, both in the principal action, and in the chief epiſodes. Paganiſm could not furniſh out a real action for a fable greater than that of the Iliad or Æneid, and therefore an heathen could not form a higher notion of a poem than

one

one of that kind which they call an heroic. Whether Milton's is not of a ſublimer nature I will not preſume to determine: it is ſufficient that I ſhew there is in the Paradiſe Loſt all the greatneſs of plan, regularity of deſign, and maſterly beauties, which we diſcover in Homer and Virgil.

I muſt, in the next place, obſerve, that Milton has interwoven in the texture of his fable ſome particulars which do not ſeem to have probability enough for an epic poem; particularly in the actions which he aſcribes to Sin and Death, and the picture which he draws of the Limbo of Vanity, with other paſſages in the ſecond book. Such allegories rather favour of the ſpirit of Spenſer and Arioſto, than of Homer and Virgil.

In the ſtructure of his poem he has likewiſe admitted of too many digreſſions. It is finely obſerved by Ariſtotle, that the author of an heroic poem ſhould ſeldom ſpeak himſelf, but throw as much of his work as he can into the mouths of thoſe who are his principal actors.

Milton has, in the general diſpoſition of his fable, very finely obſerved this great rule; inſomuch that there is ſcarce a third part of it which comes from the poet; the reſt is ſpoken either by Adam and Eve, or by ſome good or evil ſpirit who is engaged either in their deſtruction or defence.

From

From what has been here obſerved, it appears, that digreſſions are by no means to be allowed of in an epic poem. Milton's complaint for his blindneſs, his panegyric on marriage, his reflections on Adam and Eve's going naked, of the Angel's eating, and ſeveral other paſſages in his poem, are liable to the ſame exception, tho' I muſt confeſs there is ſo great a beauty in theſe very digreſſions that I would not wiſh them out of his poem.

I have elſewhere ſpoken of the characters of Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, and declared my opinion as to the allegorical perſons who are introduced in it.

If we look into the ſentiments, I think they are ſometimes defective under the following heads; firſt, as there are ſeveral of them too much pointed, and ſome that degenerate even into puns. Of this laſt kind, I am afraid is that in the firſt book, where, ſpeaking of the pigmies, he calls them

——The ſmall infantry
Warr'd on by cranes——

Another blemiſh that appears in ſome of his thoughts, is his frequent alluſion to heathen fables, which are not certainly of a piece with the divine ſubject of which he treats. I do not find fault with theſe alluſions, where the poet himſelf repreſents them as fabulous, as he does in ſome places,

places, but where he mentions them as truths and matters of fact.

A third fault in his ſentiments, is an unneceſſary oſtentation of learning, which likewiſe occurs very frequently. It is certain that both Homer and Virgil were maſters of all the learning of their times, but it ſhews itſelf in their works, after an indirect and concealed manner. Milton ſeems ambitious of letting us know, by his excurſions on free-will and predeſtination, and his many glances upon hiſtory, aſtronomy, geophraphy, and the like, as well as by the terms and phraſes he ſometimes makes uſe of, that he was acquainted with the whole circle of arts and ſciences.

If, in the laſt place, we conſider the language of this great poet, we muſt allow that it is often too much laboured, and ſometimes obſcured, by old words, tranſpoſitions, and foreign idioms. Seneca's objection to the ſtile of a great author, *Riget ejus oratio, nihil in ea placidum, nihil lene*, is what many critics make to Milton. But then Milton's ſentiments and ideas are ſo wonderfully ſublime, that it would have been impoſſible for him to have repreſented them in their full ſtrength and beauty, without having recourſe to theſe foreign aſſiſtances. Our language ſunk under him, and was unequal to that greatneſs of ſoul, which furniſhed him with ſuch glorious conceptions.

A ſecond

A ſecond fault in his language is, that he often affects a kind of jingle in his words, as in the following paſſages, and many others.

And brought into the world a world of woe.
——Begirt th' Almighty throne
Beſeeching or beſieging——
This tempted our attempt——
At one ſlight bound high over-leapt all bound.

I know there are figures for this kind of ſpeech, that ſome of the greateſt ancients have been guilty of it, and that Ariſtotle himſelf has given it a place, in his Rhetorick, among the beauties of that art. But as it is in itſelf poor and trifling, it is I think at preſent univerſally exploded by all the maſters of polite writing.

The laſt fault which I ſhall take notice of in Milton's ſtile, is the frequent uſe of what the learned call technical words, or terms of art. It is one of the great beauties of poetry to make hard things intelligible, and to deliver what is abſtruſe of itſelf in ſuch eaſy language as may be underſtood by ordinary readers: I have often wondered, how Mr. Dryden could tranſlate a paſſage out of Virgil after the following manner.

Tack to the larboard, and ſtand off to ſea,
Veer ſtarboard ſea and land.——

Milton, when he is upon building, mentions doric pillars, pilaſters, cornice, freeze, architrave.

When

When he talks of heavenly bodies, you meet with ecliptic, eccentric, the trepidation, ſtars dropping from the zenith, rays culminating from the equator. To which might be added many inſtances of the like kind in ſeveral other arts and ſciences.

Thus far we have followed that noble and excellent critic Mr. Addiſon, in his remarks on a poem which is the boaſt and glory of the Engliſh language: thoſe who are deſirous of a more particular account of its many beauties, the detail of which would have been too long to have inſerted under the general heads, to which, for the ſake of brevity, we have here confined ourſelves, may conſult his notes and criticiſms on the whole twelve books of Paradiſe Loſt, collected from his ſeveral Spectators on this ſubject, and affixed to an edition of Milton by Mr. Fenton.

Second SECTION.

Concerning dramatic poetry.

MAN is born to be a ſpectator. This the great univerſe, with all its glories, which ſeem diſplayed by the Creator on purpoſe to be viewed and admired, plainly declare. Accordingly we find that our ſight is the moſt lively and perfect of all our ſenſes; and that which ſupplies the mind with the richeſt ſtore of ideas.

But from the very activity of this ſenſe ariſes the neceſſity of varying its objects from time to time. As ſoon as it has conveyed to the mind the image of thoſe things with which it has been ſtruck, it immediately ſets out in queſt of new ones; which it no ſooner perceives than it ſeizes them with avidity. From hence the eſtabliſhment of ſhews and entertainments took its riſe among all nations. Men muſt be provided with theſe by ſome means or another; and as the events in nature or ſociety do but ſparingly, and at conſiderable intervals, furniſh circumſtances really ſtriking and intereſting, they look upon themſelves as ſenſibly obliged to thoſe, who have a talent for creating new ones for them, be they ever ſo imaginary or void of reality.

The buffoonery and tricks of a mountebank on the ſtage, ſome creature little known, or ſeldom ſeen, or taught to perform any extraordinary feats, will, in every country, draw the whole people together after them, and engroſs all their attention, and that for a conſiderable time, in ſpite of themſelves. Nature being the ſame every where, and in all men learned or ignorant, great and ſmall, a people or individually, it was not poſſible but that the exhibitions of art ſhould take place in civil ſociety. But then, of what kind ſhould theſe be to cauſe the ſtrongeſt impreſſion of pleaſure in us?

We

We may have repreſentations of ſome of the ordinary effects or accidents in nature, ſuch as a river overflowing its banks, a ſteep rock, a plain, a foreſt, a lawn, or a fight between two fierce animals. But as theſe objects have little or no connection with our own ſtate, as we have nothing to hope nor any thing to fear from them, as they promiſe us neither good nor harm, they are mere matters of curioſity, which ſtrike us only for the firſt time, and then ſolely on account of their novelty. If they pleaſe a ſecond time, it is only in conſequence of the happy execution of the act which preſents them.

The mind of man then requires ſomething more immediately intereſting, and capable of touching us more nearly. But what object muſt this be? Ourſelves! Shew us in other men what we ourſelves are, then ſhall we become intereſted in the entertainments yield it our whole attention, and preſerve a ſtrong and lively impreſſion from it.

Man, as compoſed of a body and ſoul, may be affected by two ſorts of entertainments.

Thoſe nations, who have cultivated the body more than the mind, have in general given the preference to thoſe entertainments wherein the ſtrength of body and activity of limbs were exhibited to the beſt advantage. Thoſe, again who cultivated the mind, and were leſs ſollicitous about bodily endowments, have preferred thoſe

repreſentations, which have diſcovered the reſources of genius, and ſecret ſprings of the paſſions. Some nations again have equally cultivated both; with theſe, either kind of ſpectacle was held in equal eſteem.

But there is this difference to be noted between theſe two ſorts of repreſentation; that in thoſe which belong to the body, reality may take place, ſo that whatever paſſes is true and without diſguiſe; ſuch are the ſhews of gladiators, whoſe lives depend on the iſſue of the combat. But it may happen likewiſe that it ſhall be only an imitation of reality; as in thoſe naval fights which Roman flattery exhibited in honor of Auguſtus and his victory at Actium. So that in this kind of entertainment the action may be either real, or only an imitation.

In ſuch entertainments where the ſoul is concerned, it is not poſſible for any thing to be otherwiſe than imitated, becauſe the very intention of being diſcovered is a contradiction to the reality of the paſſions: a man who puts himſelf into a rage only to appear angry, has nothing but the image of anger. Hence every paſſion, which is intended only for repreſentation, can neceſſarily be no other than an imitation, counterfeit, or fiction of ſuch paſſion. Now, as the operations of the mind are ſo intimately connected with thoſe of the heart, in this caſe, they

they muſt, like thoſe of the heart, be purely feigned and artificial.

From this propoſition we draw two concluſions. Firſt, that thoſe entertainments, which exhibit bodily ſtrength and activity, require very little art, ſince every thing is open, undiſguiſed, and real; and that, on the contrary, thoſe wherein we behold the action of the ſoul, ſtands in need of an infinite deal of artifice, ſince the whole is a falſity, which we are to endeavour by all poſſible means to paſs off for truth.

The ſecond conſequence is, that the bodily entertainments muſt convey a more ſtrong and lively impreſſion, and by the ſhock they give the ſoul, render it more firm and hardy, ſometimes even to a degree of cruelty. The entertainment of the ſoul, on the contrary, inſpire more tender and delicate ſenſations, ſuch as humaniſe and ſoften the heart rather than harden it. A man murdered on a public ſtage, accuſtoms the ſpectator to behold the effuſion of blood with a kind of ſavage pleaſure. Hypolitus torn to death by his horſes behind the ſcenes, accuſtoms him to pity and compaſſion for the misfortunes of the wretched. The firſt of theſe repreſentations belong more particularly to a warlike people: the other is wholly an art of peace, becauſe it ſerves to unite fellow citizens by the gentle ties of humanity and compaſſion.

Our buſineſs now is to explain the nature, rules, and hiſtory of this kind of entertainment, and to diſtinguiſh its different ſpecieſes.

In doing which we ſhall, in the firſt place conſider the drama in general, and then its two different ſpecies, tragedy and comedy.

ARTICLE I.

Of the drama in general.

THE drama, or dramatic poetry, is thus called from the Greek δράμα, which comes from the Eolic δράειν or δρᾶν, ſignifying to act, or perform, becauſe in this ſpecies of poetry the action is not related, as it is in the epic, but is really exhibited in the perſons of thoſe who repreſent it.

Under this head we may rank whatever belongs to the epic. Gods, heroes, ſhepherds, are equally ſubjects for a ſpectacle or repreſentation. And if there is any reſtriction, it only ariſes from the difference in the form of theſe two ſpecies of poetry; the epic action being only related, not ſeen. The dramatic action is ſubjected to the eye, and ſhould be repreſented as truth. The judgment of the eyes is much more to be apprehended in what relates to entertainment than that of the ears. This is ſo true, that things are frequently introduced in the drama by way of narration, which would appear impro-

improbable if exhibited on the ſtage. We are told, that Hypolitus has been attacked by a ſea-monſter, and torn to pieces by his own horſes, becauſe had the poet choſe to have repreſented this fact on the ſtage, inſtead of relating it, there would have been a number of little circumſtances attending the execution, which muſt neceſſarily have diſcovered the art, and changed our pity into laughter. Horace's precept in this caſe is expreſs, as is that of a ſtill greater maſter than Horace, reaſon, which plainly points it out to us.

Moreover, it is required that the action be not only ſingle, but that it be confined to the ſame day and place. The reaſon of this is in the rules of imitation.

If the place of action is changed in the repreſentation, while I, who am a ſpectator of it, remain ſtill in the ſame place, I immediately diſcover the art.

If the action I behold laſts a year, a month, or ſeveral days, while I am ſenſible that I have ſeen it begin and end within the ſpace of three or four hours, I perceive that there is ſome artifice uſed. After once diſcovering the deceit, I can no longer be brought to believe any thing that paſſes, and conſequently nothing in the repreſentation will be capable of affecting me.

The whole of what we have to ſay on drama in general, may be reduced to three heads.

Firſt, to examine in what conſiſts dramatic probability. A queſtion, according to Corneille, the moſt important, and at the ſame time the moſt difficult, of any in the whole art of poetry. Secondly, what the rules are which it preſcribes in relation to the action, its duration, and the place where it paſſes. Laſtly, we ſhall add ſome few obſervations on the ſtile of dramatic pieces, and on decorations and declamation.

CHAP. I.

Of the dramatic probability.

DRamatic actions are of four kinds. Firſt, they are either wholly true and hiſtorical, as that of Eſther who ſubverts the wicked Haman. Secondly, they are only founded upon truth, and fictitious in ſome of the circumſtances, as in the Horatii of Corneille; or, thirdly, they are altered, both in wholly changing their foundation and circumſtances, ſo that the hiſtorical part is preſerved only in the names of the perſonages, as in Heraclius; or, laſtly, the whole is a work of fiction and imagination, the names, actions, and circumſtances, being intirely of the poet's own invention, as in moſt comedies.

The poet is under no obligation, in handling his ſubject, to adhere ſtrictly to hiſtorical truth, or to relate things in the exact order in which they

they paſſed; but he may do ſo upon occaſion, if at any time he meets with a real fact, ſo circumſtanced as to have all its component parts conformable to the rules of the art. Thus Racine, as has been already obſerved, has made no alteration in the action of his Eſther, and very little in his Athaliah, and thoſe two pieces are the more affecting from that very circumſtance.

We muſt obſerve, that for an action to be conformable to hiſtory, there is no neceſſity for that hiſtory to be ſtrictly true in itſelf: it is ſufficient that it be ſuppoſed ſuch; or, in other words, it is a matter of indifference whether it be repreſented as it really paſſed, or only as it was ſaid to have paſſed. Horace does not ſay follow truth, but follow fame, report, *famam ſequere*. Suppoſititious truths are as well received in poetry as real facts.

As it rarely happens that true and real facts are ſo happily diſpoſed, as to ſerve for the baſis of a poem of any conſiderably length, the author is therefore obliged to have recourſe to fiction, either to ſupply what is wanting to his ſubject, to retrench what is ſuperfluous, or to blend the ſeveral parts in another manner.

In works of fiction, ſays Ariſtotle, the things feigned ſhould be repreſented, either as they might have happened, or as they ought to have happened. Here begins the diſcuſſion of the

dramatic probability, and this calls for the reader's whole attention.

What might have been, is the poſſible, as to the circumſtances of time, place, and perſons.

What ought to have been, is what has probably exiſted, with reſpect to thoſe circumſtances.

The poſſible requires, that nothing ſhould appear repugnant, or abſolutely contradictory to the thing's having been done, and done in ſuch a manner. Thus, it is abſolutely poſſible that a monſter might have come out of the ſea at the prayer of Theſeus. Allowing the gods to have favored the hero, he might, abſolutely ſpeaking, have obtained this prodigy of them at his earneſt requeſt.

The probable exacts ſome reaſon for the thing's having been done rather than not done, and done in one manner preferable to another. Thus, it is probable that Hypolitus's horſes might have taken fright on ſeeing a horrible monſter coming towards them, roaring, and vomitting out flames of fire; and that Hypolitus falling from his chariot, and being hampered in the traces, was dragged over the rocks.

Ariſtotle, after having laid it down as a rule that things are to be treated as they might, or ought have paſſed, adds, agreeable to probability or neceſſity.

Theſe two words are equally applicable to what might, or ought to have paſſed; for by the

the ſame reaſon that there is a probable poſſibility, and a neceſſary poſſibility, ſo is there the probability of the fact, and the neceſſity, at leaſt a conditional one, for that fact.

Every one has not a clear idea of what is poſſible in a human action, and what is not. It is enough with reſpect to poetic poſſibility, that we have a general idea of it, though it may be a little confined, and were things to be looked more ſtrictly into, it might perhaps be found a real impoſſiblity. Thus, there are caſes wherein a probable, likely, apparent poſſibility is ſufficient. And this does in ſome meaſure excuſe the multiplicity of incidents in the Cid. In the ſpace of twenty-four hours he fights two duels, marches againſt the enemies of the ſtate, returns, is tried; fights again, and finds a means of reconciling himſelf to his miſtreſs, whoſe father he had killed, and all this in a days time. This is poſſible to conſider it in general, but to look nearly into it, we ſhould find that many years would hardly ſuffice for the performance of ſuch a variety of actions. This then is at beſt only a poſſible, likely, and apparent probability.

The other ſpecies of poſſibility, and which may be called neceſſary, certain, and evident poſſibility, is found in whatever is compoſed of parts made to be joined or connected with each other. When don Diego receives a blow, and

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that in conſequence of this his ſon undertakes to revenge him on the aggreſſor, it is evident, by the chain of ideas, that this might have happened. Here then is the probable poſſible, and the neceſſary poſſible.

Let us now proceed to the ſecond branch, which regards the exiſtence of the fact.

As two following propoſitions might have been formed on what might have been done, viz.

It is probable that ſuch a thing was poſſible.

It is neceſſary that ſuch a thing might have been poſſible.

So may other two on what ought to have been done, viz.

It is probable that ſuch a thing was done, and done in ſuch a manner.

It is neceſſary that ſuch a thing ſhould have been done, and done in ſuch a manner.

From hence it follows that there are four degrees of poetical truth; two for the poſſibility, and two for the exiſtence.

Sometimes the apparent poſſibility of a thing is enough of itſelf. The real and acknowledged poſſibility makes a new degree of truth. To add yet a third, there muſt be an apparent reaſon to believe that ſuch a thing exiſted. Laſtly, to compleat the probability, it ſhould be neceſſary that ſuch a thing exiſted. Here is the whole of Ariſtotle's principles, "that in dra-

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" matic poetry things feigned are to be treated " as they might or ought to have paſſed, agree- " able to probability or neceſſity."

Let us apply this to example; ſuppoſe a mother to kill her ſon in cold blood, this is probably poſſible; Leontina did ſo; this is the firſt degree. Two children are changed at nurſe one for another; this is evidently poſſible; Leontina did this again; ſecond degree. Suppoſe this exchange to have been kept ſecret ſo long as it was dangerous to diſcover it; this happened probably; third degree. Laſtly, ſuppoſe it at length revealed, it throws Phocas into anxiety and confuſion; this happened neceſſarily; here is the fourth degree.

This laſt degree includes the other three; the third includes the two preceding ones; the ſecond includes the firſt; and the firſt is by itſelf, and includes no other: it is the laſt of all the degrees of probability, and, conſequently that which has the leaſt effect in the drama. It is ſufficient in the epic; but in the drama it is beſt not to be contented with this only, but to endeavour to have the fourth degree in ſome places, and the third ſhould reign through the whole.

Over and above this firſt diviſion of probability into the poſſible and real, there is yet another, by which it is diſtinguiſhed into ordinary and extraordinary.

The firſt of theſe is found in any action that happens oftner, or at leaſt as often as its contrary,

trary. A mother loves her ſon, and a lover hates his rival; this is ordinary probability.

The extraordinary probability is where any action happens more rarely than its contrary; but yet often enough not to be looked upon as a prodigy when it does happen. Thus, an artful man is deceived by one not ſo cunning as himſelf; a ſtrong man is overcome by a weaker.

The French academy, in its obſervations on the Cid, has given us at once the definition and rule for this matter.

"The probable, whether common or extra-
"ordinary, ſhould have this in particular to it,
"that when the poet preſents it to the audience,
"they ſhould, either from the firſt impreſſion
"it makes on their minds, or upon reflection
"on the ſeveral efficient parts, be ready to believe
"that what they ſee is no other than truth, as
"they find nothing in it to contradict that idea."*

Thus the probable is the poſſible, conceived as ſuch, and carrying in itſelf its proof of poſſibility. Whatever does not wear this proof, though true in itſelf, ceaſes to be probable, and from that inſtant becomes improper for a poetic ſubject. I have ſaid, it ſhould contain the proofs in itſelf, and for this reaſon; the proofs

* Le vraiſemblable, dit elle, tant le commun que l'extraordinaire, doit avoir cela de particulier, que, ſoit par ſoit par le premiere notion de l'eſprit, ſoit par réflexion ſur toutes, les parties dont il réſulte, lorſque le poëte l'expoſe aux auditeurs & aux ſpectateurs, ils ſe portent â croire, ſans autre preuve, qu'il ne contient rien que de vrai, pour ce qu'ils ne voient rien qui y répugne.

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of facts, like the authority of witneſſes, are not ſufficient alone, the thing preſented muſt prove itſelf by its probability.

There is likewiſe a diviſion of the neceſſary. This word may be taken in two ſenſes.

It may ſignify the neceſſity of things, with reſpect to the action conſidered as natural; or the neceſſity of thoſe things, with regard to the ſame action conſidered as the work of art; or laſtly, the neceſſity of connection and conſequence. Theſe diſcuſſions are ſubtile; but without entering into them, one cannot underſtand the nature or laws of the drama, nor be able to reaſon concerning them.

Let us now explain theſe three kinds of neceſſity by examples.

The neceſſity of connection is very eaſily comprehended. Horatia is violently in love with Curiatius; he is ſlain: this ſuppoſed, ſhe muſt neceſſarily be greatly afflicted. The neceſſity of connection then is, when one thing neceſſarily brings on another, or that one thing neceſſarily follows another.

The two other kinds are likewiſe neceſſities of connection; but over and above that, they are likewiſe neceſſities of the means.

The diſpute for empire between Alba and Rome, could be decided only by combat. Therefore the combat in the tragedy of the Horatii, is a thing neceſſary from the neceſſity of the means, conſidering it as a natural action.

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This is what is called the exigence of the action, becauſe the action cannot be performed without it. We muſt ſubmit to this exigence, this neceſſity; it is a rule.

But it is not the ſame with the other kind of neceſſary, which regards the action conſidered as the work of art. This may be called the neceſſity of the poet, who, in order to fulfil the laws of his art, employs things of which a natural action does not ſtand in need. Thus Corneille, to make out five acts, has tacked umph, the death of Camilla, to the triumph of her brother Horatius. This was an exigence on the poet with regard to the number of acts; and in like manner the ſame poet in his Cid, has brought all the operations of that character into th ecompaſs on four and twenty hours; this was the exigence of the poet with regard to the unity of time. It is the ſame with the unity of place, to preſerve which the poet is ſometimes obliged bring characters into a public place or a temple, which ought to have remained within the palace.

Thus, the neceſſity of the action comprehends the means, without which the natural actions would not go on, or at leaſt not go on ſo happily. The exigence of the poet comprehends the means that his genius and art ſupplied him with, to reduce a natural action to the rules of the theatre, and to order it ſo that it may be performed

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in one day and one place, and extend from the firſt to the fifth act incluſively.

But we are not to underſtand Ariſtotle's principle concerning the exigence of the poet, as if what was neceſſary for the poet in conforming to his art, was equitable, otherwiſe there would be no ſuch thing as rules.

We may readily conceive, that on account of the great difficulty of reconciling nature to art in ſeveral caſes, it is neceſſary to have ſome indulgence for thoſe who toil and torment themſelves to afford us diverſion; but then, on the other hand, was this to grow into a rule, young artiſts would immediately be for turning it to their own advantage, without conſidering whether they were poſſeſſed of any thing to deſerve it.

There is a certain art in conciliating things, and covering the exigence of the poet by that of the action. A ſkilful artiſt knows how to conceal himſelf, and make every thing that he ſays and does, appear for the benefit of the ſubject. For example: The young Horatius, on departing for the field, begs of his father to retain Sabina and Camilla, who otherwiſe would probably have followed him to the field, and diſturbed the combat. Corneille ſtood in need of this circumſtance, to keep the ſtage full while the combat was going on. We meet with numberleſs examples of the like artifice in almoſt all our good poets.

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The connections, to be good need, not always be neceſſary; it is ſufficient if they are probable. It is likewiſe ſufficient if the means conduce in a probable manner to the effect. It would be better indeed that they ſhould neceſſarily lead to it; but we have no right to make a point of this.

CHAP. II.

Of the three unities.

THERE are three kinds of unity in a dramatic piece, viz. the unity of action; the unity of time; and the unity of place.

Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un ſeul fait accomplé,
Tienne juſqu'à la fin le theatre rempli.

Boil. Art. Poet.

Let unity of action, time, and place,
Keep the ſtage full, and all your labors grace.

Unity of action.

There is an unity of action when one ſingle end is propoſed, to which all the means made uſe of tend. Be theſe means many or few it matters not. Each particular action may concur in ſome manner, and with different intentions: the end alone muſt concentrate all the different points, and unite them in one.

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The dramatic action is divided into acts; theſe acts into ſcenes.

An act may be defined, an action making an eſſential part of another action, a ſubordinate action ſerving as the means of arriving at the ultimate point in view; or, in fine, an action which ſuppoſes others to precede or follow it. Thus in the Horatii, the action of the poem is the combat of the three Horatii with the three Curiatii. But this action neceſſarily ſuppoſes others to have preceded it, and prepared the way for it. Firſt the three Horatii are pitched upon; this choice is an action: this makes the ſubject of the firſt act. Next, the three Curiatii are choſen on their ſide, which cauſes great perplexity in the two families; this is the ſecond act, or the ſecond preparatory action. The combatants take the field, two of the Horatii are killed, and the three Curiatii remain alive; this is a third action; but is immediately followed by a fourth which is the very reverſe of the former: the only remaining brother of the Horatii kills the three Curiatii; this is the fourth act: to render which of a due extent it includes another action, which is the murder of Camilla. Laſtly, the fifth act is the trial of Horatius as the murderer of his ſiſter. Here we clearly perceive that every act contains one, and ſometimes two actions, and all tending

tending, either mediately or immediately, to one common end.

When theſe actions run all in one direct line, and ſucceed each other by turns till they arrive at the propoſed end, then the action is ſimple, and without epiſode.

Of theſe actions, if ſome are only collateral, or ſuperfluous additions to the principal action, then they are called epiſodes. But when once they are united to the principal action, then they become parts of it, keep pace with it to the common goal, and run together in one and the ſame ſtream. They are more or leſs epiſodic as they fall ſooner or later into the principal action. But when they do not unite with the principal action at all, they are bad. Thus the epiſode of Hypolitus and Phœdra falls into the principal action in the fourth act. That of the Infanta in the Cid, does not fall in with it in any place, and conſequently is entirely out of rule.

The five acts have each their particular rules, and theſe are neceſſary to be obſerved by every one who expects to pleaſe.

The firſt, called by the antients *protaſis*, becauſe it contains the propoſition of the ſubject, ought to explain the thing in queſtion in a plain and clear manner. Thus, in Cinna, Emilia, at the opening of the ſcene, diſcovers her furious deſire of revenge. Though ſhe loves Cinna,

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ſhe will not yield her hand to him, but on condition that he will aſſaſſinate Auguſtus.

Quoique j'aime Cinna, quoique mon cœur l'adore;
S'il veut me poſſéder, Auguſte doit perir.
Sa tête eſt le ſeul prix dont il peut m'aquerir.

Though I love Cinna, though my heart doats on him,
Yet if he hopes to win me to his arms,
Cæſar muſt periſh, and his death alone
Muſt be the purchaſe of Emilia's hand.

In the ſecond place, it ſhould bring us acquainted with all the perſonages and their characters. Now this may be done by introducing them in perſon, as in Cinna; where Emilia, Cinna, Fulvia, Evander, &c. appear, or by pointing them out indirectly, but in that part of their character which bears the neareſt relation to the enterpriſe. Thus, in the firſt act of Cinna, we have the character of Auguſtus given us, whom we have not yet ſeen, and he is deſcribed as an uſurper, and the murderer of Emilia's father. In like manner we have Livia repreſented as a princeſs who has a great power over Auguſtus; and laſtly, Maximus, who is charged with the ſecond part in the conſpiracy.

In the third place, the plot ſhould begin in the firſt act, and a foundation laid for the unraveling, but ſtill without admitting any air of preparation.

paration. The plot in the piece before us, is to know whether Cinna will kill Auguſtus, who is his benefactor, for the ſake of obeying his miſtreſs Emilia. The unravelling is, the preſervation of Auguſtus, and his pardoning Cinna through the advice of Livia; this incident is prepared in this ſpeech of Emilia's.

Je vais donc chez Livie,
Puiſque dans ton péril il me reſte un moyen
De faire agir pour toi ſon crédit & le mien.

I'll to the empreſs: there may yet be found
Some means to ſave thee from th' impending ruin,
Livia ſhall join her influence with mine.

There are ſeveral ways of making the expoſition of the ſubject. Sometimes it is done by an actor, who ſpeaks a prologue ſeparate from the piece; this requires no art. Sometimes an actor, who is ſuppoſed intirely ignorant of the affair, has related to him what is intended for the baſis of the action. By this artifice the ſpectator receives the inſtruction that ſeems meant for the actor. Thus Jaſon relates to Pollio, as he goes by, his new flame for Creuſa, and his diſlike to Medea. But this artifice is now grown ſtale, as the taſte is become more delicate. The action at preſent is expected to diſcover itſelf, and that in the courſe of it the poet ſhould dexterouſly fix the ſcene of action;

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and the time of its beginning, unfold his whole plan, and characteriſe his actors. We have a model of this kind of expoſition in the Horatii of Corneille.

In the ſecond, third, and fourth acts, the plot ſhould thicken more and more, and the expectation and inquietude of the audience be kept continually increaſing. But as the ſame ſentiment cannot increaſe all at once, and without taking ſome repoſe, it muſt therefore be relieved by the intervention of other ſentiments. The ſoul is now and then to be exhilarated by ſome tranſient moments of joy, in order to be replunged with a greater force into a ſtate of ſorrow. Thus in Cinna, the conſpiracy being formed, the conſpirators are all contented. At that very inſtant Auguſtus ſends for the chiefs of the conſpiracy: this alarms us. He aſks their advice about quitting the empire: our fears are now at an end; but intereſt or curioſity ſupply their place. Cinna, penetrated with the generoſity of Auguſtus, can no longer entertain the thoughts of aſſaſſinating him: our hopes begin to revive for Auguſtus: but Emilia brings Cinna back to his former purpoſe; and he purſues it with redoubled ardor. Our anxiety is now increaſed. The conſpiracy is diſcovered; we give all for loſt: Auguſtus generouſly forgives his enemies, and our heart reſumes its former tranquillity.

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The fifth act ſhould be the moſt ſtirring and full of buſineſs of any; for the longer the ſpectator has been kept in expectation, the more impatient he is to be relieved. Therefore we ſhould diſpleaſe were we to attempt to make a long interval between the fourth and fifth acts: every thing ought to be ready for ſtriking the finiſhing ſtroke at the end of the fourth act; and the beginning of the fifth ſhould be the beginning of the cataſtrophe. The unravelling ſhould, if poſſible, finiſh with the laſt ſcene. It is a rule, to determine the fate of all the principal characters, who have appeared in the courſe of the piece, in this act. Having had a part in the action, it is juſt they ſhould have a ſhare alſo in the event. As the confident in tragedy, and the valet in comedy, are attached to the fortunes of thoſe whoſe ſervants or emiſſaries they are, the fate of theſe is ſuppoſed to be decided in that of their maſters.

In like manner, as the dramatic action is compoſed of acts, ſo are theſe acts compoſed of ſcenes.

A ſcene is a part of an act, characteriſed by the entrance or exit of ſome one or other of the performers in the action.

An act has, as well as an action, its beginning, middle, and end. Theſe parts are divided among the different actors, ſome of which command, others adviſe, and others execute, through

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the different ſcenes, which ſhould be ſo connected, that we may perceive the reaſon of one actor's coming in and another's going off.

Nothing ſavors more of comedy, than to ſee an actor go out merely becauſe he has nothing left to ſay; or to ſee another come in, only to prevent the ſtage from being left empty; or again, to ſee every body upon the ſtage walk off, purely to make room for other actors who are to come in, but muſt not be ſeen in the ſame place with thoſe who are juſt gone off.

The connexion of the ſcenes is kept up either by the preſence of the actors, their dialogue, ſomething they ſee, or ſome noiſe. Firſt, by the preſence of the actors, when a number of them, at entering, or going off, remain a little while upon the ſtage. Secondly, by the dialogue which paſſes between them. Thirdly, by what they ſee, as when the perſon who enters has ſeen the other going off, and vice verſâ; or when both parties have perceived each other. By ſome noiſe, when the ſtage remaining empty, a noiſe is heard as of ſome one coming in. This laſt kind of connexion is rather inſufficient. The third is abſolutely neceſſary; the two others are what one would wiſh.

The unity of time.

The unity of time ſuppoſes the ſpace of a natural day the ſun makes in, or the revolution of, twenty-

four hours, by which is meant, that the action is to begin and end in that ſpace, for the reaſon we have given elſewhere. And indeed this rule is not ſo much a rule of rigor as a modification, or kind of ſoftning of the ſtrict rule. The abſolute rule confines the duration of the action to the time actually taken up in the repreſentation, that is, to begin and end within two or three hours at fartheſt. We taſte the pleaſure ariſing from this degree of perfection in the tragedies of Oedipus, the Horatii, and Athaliah. But as it is very rare to meet with ſubjects that can be confined within ſuch narrow limits; cuſtom has enlarged the rule, and extended the duration of the action to twenty-four hours. But as the repreſentation does, in fact, require at moſt not above three hours, how are theſe twenty-four to be placed and diſtributed? As follows,

In five acts there are four interludes; that is, four reſts, or ſpaces between, during which the action remains ſuſpended. A ſkilful poet will make one of theſe intervals anſwer to the ſpace of one whole night; and the reſt of the ſuperfluous time, that remains on his hands, he will diſtribute in the other intervals; in ſuch a manner that each act ſhall have occaſion for no more time, than juſt what is taken up by the repreſentation. This is a fixed rule. There would be no bearing to ſee the tranſactions of ten or twelve hours repreſented by one continued action,

tion, in which the actors are perpetually coming in, and going off, when that action did not take up above half an hour. The reaſon of this is evident. The drama repreſents the duration of time, as well as the action. Now, a quarter of an hour cannot repreſent a day, nor one hour ten. But half an hour may very well repreſent an hour; ſo that an exact proportion may be diſpenſed with, as not being abſolutely neceſſary; but ſuch a proportion at leaſt ſhould be preſerved, as may be, morally ſpeaking, juſt.

Unity of place.

Unity of place, taken in the rigorous ſenſe of the term, requires that every thing ſhould paſs exactly on the ſame ſpot. The ſame indulgence, which enlarged the limits of the time, will not be admitted here. It is not ſo eaſy to deceive the eye, which is always attentively fixed on the repreſentation, as the mind; which in caſes of this kind is, in a manner, wholly abſorbed in imagination and ſentiment. Beſides that, when the actors treſpaſs a little upon the unity of time, they have art enough not to fix too preciſely the inſtant in which the action begins. This innocent artifice is generally agreeable to us, and we even owe them thanks for it, ſince by this means they conceal a defect in the action, which, if diſcovered, would take from our pleaſure. But if the place was changed, and

this change made without altering the ſcenery, and by this means a confuſion introduced into the repreſentation, the place, action, and diſcourſes, would no longer have any connection. The actor would ſay, *What a ſuperb temple is this! How delicious is this garden!* and we are ſtill in a cloſet, where the former acts placed us. If the ſcenes are ſhifted, the charms of the illuſion are broken. Is there any appearance of probability that the place we behold ſhould be changed into a deſert, a foreſt, or a palace? In nature, if the ſcene changes, it is becauſe we ourſelves change place. But here it is the reverſe. The point of ſight changes its place, and we remain where we were before.

This rule occaſions a great deal of conſtraint and torment to the poets; it is their buſineſs to obviate all inconſiſtencies, or to take the ſubject which has the leaſt. Now, it is an inconſiſtency to make a king appear on the ſtage, merely to hear a criminal, who has yet ſomewhat more to ſay to him before he goes off; naturally the criminal ought to be carried before the king, but then the unity of place is broke. In Cinna it is neceſſary that the conſpiracy ſhould be carried on in Emilia's apartment, and that Auguſtus ſhould enter that apartment to confound Cinna, and then pardon him; this is rather unnatural, but it muſt be ſo.

The

The antients had one great advantage over us in this reſpect. They always laid the ſcene in ſome public place, where every body commonly reſorted at firſt going out of their houſes, to talk of public affairs. The comedies of Plautus, Terence, and Ariſtophanes, have all of them ſuch a place.

M. Corneille thinks that there is no neceſſity for ſo ſtrictly pointing out the place of the ſcene, and that it is enough to ſay it is at Athens, in Rome, or at moſt in ſuch a palace, and to leave it to the ſpectator's imagination, either to determine the place more exactly, or elſe to leave it undetermined, as the author himſelf has done.

CHAP. III.

Stile of dramatic poetry.

Si dicentis erunt fortunis abſona dicta,
Romani tollent equites peditesque cachinnum.
HOR. Art. Poet.

IF the ſtile of the perſon that is ſpeaking does not agree with the condition he appears in, the audience in general, learned and illiterate, the courtier and the clown, will alike join to laugh at both author and actor. This is the rule laid down by an eminent maſter.

The condition of the perſon who ſpeaks, ſhould be the rule of the ſtile. A king, a private man, a woman, the man of buſineſs, and

the humble laborer, are not to talk in the ſame ſtrain. But this is not enough; ſuppoſe theſe ſame perſonages in great joy, or deep diſtreſs, elevated with hopes, or depreſſed by fears; the actual ſtate they are in, at that time, ſhould give a new turn to their ſtile; but this ſhould ſtill be founded on the firſt, as their preſent ſtate is on their habitual or cuſtomary one, which is called the condition of the perſon in general.

Every actor ſhould avoid, in general, whatever appears like art, or ſtudied declamation; as,

Firſt, all common place thoughts, and moral ſentences, which are like foreign bodies in the middle of a diſcourſe, that have no connection with any thing elſe. Thus, inſtead of ſaying, *We ſhould diſtruſt even gifts when coming from an enemy*, he will ſay, *I fear the Greeks even in their bounty.* Young authors are apt to think they have done wonders in giving ſome glittering ſentence of morality, detached from the main piece, for a ſuperficial ſpectator to carry home with him to quote upon occaſion. But it is much better to weave theſe into the common texture, *in texto veſtibus colore.* In the room of ſaying, When once we are determined upon death, we have no more to fear; it is better expreſſed thus, I'll die, what have I to fear? *Quem metui moritura?* The maxim thus joined to an action, is a perſon, and from ſpeculative, that it was before, becomes active; has

has more the air of truth, and appears with more life and warmth; which is infinitely preferable to a vain floriſh, and unmeaning eclat. Not only ſo, but a frequent uſe of ſentences, has the appearance of dogmatiſm, and declamation; it looks as if the writer wanted to make a parade of doctrine and fine ſentiments, which belong only to the ſophiſts. Not but that in ſome caſes it is allowable to lay down a particular maxim, by way of principle; and ſometimes it is even neceſſary; but when this is not the caſe, which is eaſily ſeen, and it is merely done for the ſake of introducing falſe glitter, it is a fault which every good author will be ſtudious to avoid.

Secondly, he ſhould not uſe rhetorical figures, where they may diſcover any thing of art, ſuch as a diſplay of ſimiles, frequency of repetitions, laboured deſcriptions, and lyric rhapſodies; in a word, every thing that ſhews us the poet or the orator putting words into the mouths of the actors. This matter will admit of being carried to a great length: but what we have already ſaid upon the ſtile in general, is ſufficient to give a competent and juſt idea of this rule.

The dialogue.

An actor, when ſpeaking by himſelf, makes what is called a monologue or ſoliloquy; and when ſeveral actors ſpeak, and direct their diſcourſe to each other, it is called a dialogue.

Every perſon who ſpeaks, ought to have at leaſt at apparent reaſon for ſo doing.

All ſoliloquies ſhould be ſhort, for this reaſon, that they are of themſelves unnatural. If the ſoliloquy is long, the actor ought to be violently agitated. A man, at his eaſe, contents himſelf with thinking and reflecting: it is only when he feels a violent commotion within that he breaks forth, takes large ſtrides, makes a number of geſtures, and utters ſeveral words. Of this nature is the ſoliloquy of Medea in P. Corneille; and of Agamemnon in Racine, when he is diſputing with himſelf aloud, whether he ſhall ſacrifice Iphigenia, or not. Here is a kind of dialogue between two perſons in one. The king and the father diſpute their rights between them. One will ſacrifice her; the other will not. To avoid a length and frequency of ſoliloquies, authors have invented confidents, in whoſe breaſt the dramatic hero repoſes all his griefs, and commits his future deſigns; but the part of theſe confidents is in general ſo cold and taſteleſs, that the remedy is little better than the diſeaſe.

In the dialogue, ſpeech is to be conſidered as a public benefit, to which every interlocutor has an equal right; and which ought to be divided among them according to their reſpective intereſts, and the rules of decorum. There ſhould be always an apparent, ſenſible reaſon, why it paſſes

paſſes from one to the other. This diſtribution requires the more art, as there ought to be no appearance of art in it. The ideas, and the intereſts, ſhould mutually intermingle and unite, ſet off, increaſe, contract, diſcover, and repel each other, in the moſt free, eaſy, and lively manner.

CHAP. IV.

Of theatrical decoration or ſcenery.

EVERY action muſt paſs in ſome place, and this place ought to be agreeable to the quality of the perſons concerned in the action. If ſhepherds, the ſcene ſhould be in the country; if kings and princes, in courts and palaces; and ſo for the reſt.

Provided the proper character of the place is maintained, it is allowable to embelliſh it with all the riches of art; coloring and perſpective are at the whole expence. However, it is requiſite that the characters of the actors ſhould be repreſented in the ſcenes themſelves; a juſt proportion ſhould be obſerved between the dwelling, and the perſon that inhabits it; and that it be expreſſive of the cuſtoms of the times, countries, and nations. An American ſhould neither be cloathed nor lodged like a Frenchman, nor a Frenchman like one of the old Romans, nor even like a modern Spaniard. If the poet has no model in his eye, he ſhould fi-

gure one to himſelf, agreeable to the idea that he may ſuppoſe the ſpectators will entertain of it.

And this ſeems the moſt proper place to give our readers ſome idea of the theatres of the ancients. But as the Romans borrowed every thing they had of this kind from the Greeks; it will be ſufficient to ſpeak only of the theatre, ſuch as it was, with the Romans.

The theatre with the Romans was a very ſpacious and magnificent place, with long porticoes, covered galleries, and beautiful allies planted with rows of trees, where the people walked till the ſports began.

But in order to convey a more particular and diſtinct idea of this theatre, we muſt conſider it in three parts. Firſt, the ſcaffolding, or the ſcene, which we now call the ſtage. Secondly, the orcheſtra, which anſwers to our pit. Thirdly, the amphitheatre.

The ſcaffolding was placed againſt a façade, or grand front, adorned with the three orders of architecture, having a large arched door in the center, with two leſſer ones on each ſide. This building was ninety feet long, and one hundred and eighty wide, with ſide ſcenes and wings nearly the ſame as ours, and like them ranged in order of perſpective.

At the bottom of this ſcaffolding was traced a ſemicircle, of which that was the baſe, or diameter.

meter. The inſide of this ſemicircle was called the orcheſtra. In this place the buffoons, merry-andrews, end rope dancers * exhibited their drolleries. From thence aroſe the ſteps of the amphitheatre in form of a ſemicircle, to a level with the ſecond order of pillars in the façade, and this they called cavea. Above theſe ſteps ran a long portico, ſupported by columns, which anſwered to the third order of thoſe in the facade. Laſtly, above each of theſe columns was placed a ſtatue, conſiderably larger than life.

Theſe buildings were only of wood when raiſed for a private ſhew; but afterwards they built them of ſtone, and even uſed a great deal of marble, as in Pompey's theatre.

By ſcene, they underſtood the front which terminates or makes the bottom of the perſpective. The fore-ſcene, or *proſcenium*, was the place where the actors appeared, and which we at preſent call the theatre or ſtage. Behind the ſcene, called by the Greeks παρασκήνιον was the place where the actors dreſſed; ὑποσκήνιον, this was behind the front of the ſcene, under the ſcene, that is, under the floor or area, or, as we call it, behind the curtain. Above the ſcene, is whatever appeared raiſed or elevated above the buildings which were repreſented, as the machines

* Mimi, & Balatrones. JUVENAL.

for

for launching the thunder. Around the ſcene, points out the bottom and ſides, where the common decorations were. *

When a tragedy was performed, the ſtage was made to repreſent a grand palace; when comedies, common dwelling houſes; and for paſtoral pieces and ſatire, the ſcene was commonly huts or cottages.

All the actors played in maſks. Their maſks had a whole headpiece like a helmet, with a face painted on it in proper colours, with hair, and a very wide mouth, ſo formed as to make the voice conſiderably louder and deeper. From this circumſtance they were called *perſonæ*; *à perſonando*. It is to a maſk of this kind that Phœdrus's fox ſpeaks, when he exclaims, *Præclarum caput, cerebrum non habet.*†

But in what manner could theſe maſks be accommodated to the different changes of paſſions, which often occur in the ſame ſcene?

The actor, who was thus to vary his paſſions, made uſe of a maſk which, when ſeen in profile, exhibited two paſſions. One ſide, for inſtance, was painted ſo as to repreſent joy, the other grief; and when there was occaſion to make a tranſition from one paſſion to the other, the actor gave himſelf a dextrous turn, and ſhewed the other ſide.

* Vide Kennet's Antiquities. † Phœdri Fab.

As

As to their dreſs, the actors among the Greeks wore long robes, which they called *ſyrma*, a word derived from the Greek σύρω *traho*. In comedy they wore long cloaks, *pallia*, and the Romans their gown called *toga*. Hence thoſe comedies which were after the Greek manner, were called *palliatæ*, and thoſe which were in the Roman taſte *togatæ*.

Their declamation was a kind of ſinging; and had its notes like prickt ſongs, but wanted the other characteriſtics of a piece of muſic. And in this reſpect was not unlike ours in tragedy.

As the act of geſture made one of the parts of muſic with the ancients, it had its notes as well as the declamation; and, what would to us ſeem very ridiculous, on the Roman ſtage one actor frequently declaimed, and another performed the ſuitable geſtures, or motions; and this kind of accompanyment of expreſſion, formed a high concert for that people, whom cuſtom had rendered connoiſſeurs in it.

The dreſs for the feet in tragedy was the buſkin, or *cothurnus*, a kind of high-heeled ſhoe, which conſiderable raiſed the ſtature, and made the actor actor appear of an heroic ſize. The ſock, *ſoccus*, was a flat common ſhoe. The names of theſe feet-dreſſes are often uſed to expreſs the two ſpecies of drama. The buſkin, by its elevation, expreſſes the dignity and majeſty

of

of the tragic ſtile; and the ſock the ſimplicity of the comic.

CHAP. V.

Of the actors.

THIS article would require to be treated of at large. I ſhall confine myſelf only to that part of it, which has a relation to thoſe young performers who ſometimes exhibit on the theatre of a college, or in their own private houſes.

Among young ſtudents there are ſome who ſeem to have the moſt happy and apt diſpoſition to the ſciences and belles lettres: while others again ſeem deſigned by nature for any thing rather than books or ſtudy, as the army, trade, or in a word whatever requires more activity than taſte or meditation.

In the firſt of theſe it is abſolutely throwing away their time to ſet them upon any dramatic part. An exerciſe of this kind can learn them nothing but what reading and their own taſte would have furniſhed them with afterwards. In the ſecond place, they loſe the clue of their ſtudies, and contract a taſte for diſſipation: but this effect, bad as it is, is yet perhaps the leaſt of what may follow from it hereafter.

But as to thoſe of the ſecond ſort, by giving them a part to perform, they are taught, Firſt, to pronounce their mother-tongue properly, which is ſeldom the caſe with our young folks.

Secondly,

Secondly, to appear before company in an aſſured and eaſy manner. Thirdly, they learn to feel it is impoſſible to play a part well without feeling what one ſays. In fine, it is a better way of employing their time than it would otherwiſe have been. What would be loſs of time to children of a ſtudious caſt, becomes well ſpent time to ſuch as we have been ſpeaking of.

But there is one thing to be obſerved in the diſtribution of the characters, and to which parents ought to be particularly attentive.

The intention of giving young people parts to play, is with a view to their own good, and to form them betimes; and if they are now and then indulged with means of getting public applauſe, it is only to encourage them to make the better advantage of the other leſſons that are given them.

But maſters have not always this ſalutary end in view in their diſtribution of the parts. They are deſirous of acquiring ſome honor by the execution of the piece, and caſt the parts with that intention. For this reaſon they pitch upon ſuch, as they think are moſt likely to do the parts well, and ſeem to be naturally diſpoſed to ſhine in particular characters: now this often fixes a child in a fault, nay ſometimes a vice, for its whole life to come.

For example, ſuppoſe a young lad to have ſomewhat of the petit maitre, the coxcomb, in him;

him; he will be pitched upon to play the marqueſs or the fop. Another of a lazy and indolent diſpoſition, he ſhall be caſt for a character of the ſame ſtamp. Another fierce, haughty, and revengeful, they will give him Atreus * or Zanga.† And in like manner as they meet with the liar or the obdurate, the rake or the boor: ſo that theſe vices and defects, which ought to be corrected in the education of youth, are by this means in a manner grafted into their very characters. There is doubtleſs a great advantage to be derived from diſtributing virtuous characters in this manner. A generous diſpoſition is yet more ennobled by playing an Auguſtus, a Tamerlane, a Horace, and a Brutus. A character naturally mild and humane, grows ſtill more perfectly ſo in a Philintus or a Bevil. And it will be the ſame in the other characters of this ſtamp. From whence I conclude, that vicious characters ſhould be given to ſuch only as are already ſufficiently ſtrengthened in virtue, and not to be led away by the impreſſion of vice; and thoſe which are virtuous, to ſuch, who having a rebellious diſpoſition, ſtand in need of receiving a new bent, and repairing in ſome meaſure the natural defects in their own character.

* A tragedy of Corneille.
† A tragedy of Dr. Young's, called the Revenge.

And

And what will be the conſequence of ſuch a diſtribution? Why a play performed by children, ſo little fit for their parts, will be played bad enough. Doubtleſs it may be bad for the ſpectators, but it is an advantage to the actors; and was the diſtribution to be made in a different manner, the pleaſure the ſpectator would then receive, might prove an irreparable injury to the young actor.

But was this to be the caſe we ſhould have no more exhibitions of this kind in the colleges, neither the maſter, nor the young folks caring to engage when they found ſo much trouble, and ſo very little honor likely to redound from their repreſentations.

But is it impoſſible to find out a piece wherein vice does not appear contraſted with virtue? Or, ſuppoſing it impoſſible, would a chriſtian education, nay a wordly education, if otherwiſe decent and ſerious, ſtand in need of being perfected by the leſſons of a comedian? Can there be no other means found to exerciſe and form young people, and give them a graceful turn? Can they not make an eſſay of their talents in public, without aſſuming the voice of an old man of threeſcore, or the chatter of a pert prating coxcomb? Is there no other way of introducing one's ſelf genteely into the world, but by ſtepping into it from the ſtage?

However,

However, for the benefit of thoſe who may think proper to theſe kind of exerciſes, I ſhall proceed to give a few rules to be obſerved when upon the ſtage, and in the courſe of action.

In the firſt place, the young performer ſhould forget entirely that he is playing, and muſt act for the ſake of acting only, and not that of pleaſing. A care, an anxiety to pleaſe, diſtracts the mind, and will abſolutely fruſtrate his endeavours. But ſtill he ſhould be careful to place himſelf ſo as to be conveniently ſeen and heard by the whole audience.

Secondly, better have no action than a bad one. Now all action is bad that is falſe, and not of a piece with the words; or poor and feeble in its expreſſion; when overdone, or ſtronger than is required by the ſentiment to be expreſſed; or when it contradicts ſome other action; when it ſays any thing that is contrary to the expreſſion of the face and eye; or is not enough varied. There are ſome actors whoſe geſticulation has always the ſame appearance, the ſame duration, and the ſame termination; in ſaying the ſame thing over ſeveral times, the action ſhould vary though the words do not.

It is extremely rare to find a perfect action; the ſtage is always full of people who have ſome ſhare of that talent, but ſcarce one poſſeſſes it wholly. One has a vaſt deal of energy and force; but then he wants grace. Another poſ-

ſeſſes

ſeſſes this advantage; but then he is without vigor; one is ſtrong, but harſh; another is ſoft, but flat and inſipid. This man would have come very near the point of perfection, had he been properly cultivated; had he underſtood his art. That would be greatly admired, if he did but enter into his part, could he but be brought to form a proper idea of the character he attempts to play. When Roſcius, that actor ſo admired and celebrated in the moſt delightful age of the Roman republic, was to play any particular part, he did not truſt wholly to his own talent, though ſo truly great and wonderful. He called in the aſſiſtance of art and method; formed to himſelf an idea of the hero, whoſe image he was to wear; he affected himſelf ſtrongly with his action, he adopted his motives, aſſumed his paſſions, and placed himſelf in every circumſtance that was capable of animating: and when he had thus raiſed his ſoul to the deſired pitch, he gathered, from this artificial enthuſiaſm, a power that gave form and fire to every expreſſion, pointed out the exact meaſure of it, managed the variations, prepared the ſtriking parts, and diſtributed the ſoul through all the external form; inſomuch that he was always natural, always true, and always infinitely ſuperior to nature herſelf. No wonder then he was in ſuch eſteem with the Romans. Nothing can be more affecting, more eloquent, than what gives

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Secondly, better have no action than a bad one. Now all action is bad that is falſe, and not of a piece with the words; or poor and feeble in its expreſſion; when overdone, or ſtronger than is required by the ſentiment to be expreſſed; or when it contradicts ſome other action; when it ſays any thing that is contrary to the expreſſion of the face and eye; or is not enough varied. There are ſome actors whoſe geſticulation has always the ſame appearance, the ſame duration, and the ſame termination; in ſaying the ſame thing over ſeveral times, the action ſhould vary though the words do not.

It is extremely rare to find a perfect action; the ſtage is always full of people who have ſome ſhare of that talent, but ſcarce one poſſeſſes it wholly. One has a vaſt deal of energy and force; but then he wants grace. Another poſ-

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ſeſſes this advantage; but then he is without vigor; one is ſtrong, but harſh; another is ſoft, but flat and inſipid. This man would have come very near the point of perfection, had he been properly cultivated; had he underſtood his art. That would be greatly admired, if he did but enter into his part, could he but be brought to form a proper idea of the character he attempts to play. When Roſcius, that actor ſo admired and celebrated in the moſt delightful age of the Roman republic, was to play any particular part, he did not truſt wholly to his own talent, though ſo truly great and wonderful. He called in the aſſiſtance of art and method; formed to himſelf an idea of the hero, whoſe image he was to wear; he affected himſelf ſtrongly with his action, he adopted his motives, aſſumed his paſſions, and placed himſelf in every circumſtance that was capable of animating: and when he had thus raiſed his ſoul to the deſired pitch, he gathered, from this artificial enthuſiaſm, a power that gave form and fire to every expreſſion, pointed out the exact meaſure of it, managed the variations, prepared the ſtriking parts, and diſtributed the ſoul through all the external form; inſomuch that he was always natural, always true, and always infinitely ſuperior to nature herſelf. No wonder then he was in ſuch eſteem with the Romans. Nothing can be more affecting, more eloquent, than what

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gives us pleaſure; and nothing is more pleaſing than declamation, when perfect. It is the language of nature: by it, hearts correſpond directly without the help of words, a circumſtance which gives double charms and vivacity to their commerce. How is a feeling ſoul upon the rack, to ſee a maſter-piece of Shakeſpear or Rowe, Cornielle or Racine, in the hands of a wretched bungler, who has no notion, no idea, of the art he is exerciſing! Whoſe ſentiment is mere ſenſation, whoſe taſte only habitual imitation!

ARTICLE SECOND.

Of tragedy.

I.

Two ſorts of tragedy.

TRAGEDY partakes, with the epic, the grandeur and importance of the action, and differs from it only in the dramatic.

But as in the epic there are two kinds of great, the marvellous, and the heroic, ſo in tragedy there may likewiſe be two kinds; the one heroic, called ſimply, tragedy; the other wonderful, called the lyric entertainment, or opera. The marvellous is totally excluded the firſt kind, cauſe men there act as men; whereas in the other, gods act as gods, with all the apparatus of ſupernatural power; if the action here were not

not marvellous, it would, in ſome meaſure, ceaſe to be probable. Theſe two kinds have their common rules; if they have any particular ones, it is only as reſpecting the condition of the actors, or where there is any difference in the choice of the matter.

An opera, then, in its dramatic part, is the repreſentation of a marvellous action. It is the divine part of the epic brought into exhibition. As the actors here are gods, or heroes, who are demigods, they muſt reveal themſelves to men, by operations, ſpeech, and an inflexion of voice, ſurpaſſing all the laws of common probability. Their operations reſemble miracles. The heavens open, a bright cloud brings forward a celeſtial being; or there appears an enchanted palace, which vaniſhes again on the leaſt ſign, and is transformed into a deſart.

But as it has been thought proper to join theſe wonders to ſong and muſic, and that the ſubject of muſical ſong is naturally a ſentiment, as we ſhall ſee hereafter; artiſts have been therefore obliged to take the action in hand, in order to come at the paſſions, without which there is no muſic, rather than the paſſions to come at the action: and conſequently the language of the actors muſt be wholly lyric, and expreſs extaſy, enthuſiaſm, and lofty ſentiments, in order to give the muſic full room to produce its effects.

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In forming the characters of the deities, poets here, as elſewhere, follow the laws of imitation; they ſelect what they know to be moſt beautiful and ſtriking in nature, arts, and humanity, and from hence form a ſet of beings, with which they preſent us, and which we take for divinities. But they are ſtill men: it is like the Jupiter of Phidias.* We cannot go beyond ourſelves, nor characteriſe the things of imagination, any other way than by the lineaments we have met with in reality. Thus imitation always takes the lead, and acts as legiſlator.

The other kind of tragedy keeps within the limits of nature. What it has remarkably great goes no farther than heroiſm. It is the repreſentation of an heroic action. To which if we add its object, which is to excite terror and compaſſion, we have a compleat definition.

We have here two celebrated guides, Ariſtotle, and the great Corneille, to enlighten and direct us in our enquiries.

The firſt of theſe having, in his poetics, made it his principal object to explain the nature and rules of tragedy, follows the dictates of his philoſophical genius, and conſiders only the eſſence

* This was an excellent painter and ſtatuary of Greece, whoſe works were ſo very accurate, that every thing perfect was compared thereto, in like manner as the criticiſms of Ariſtarchus. Cic. Queſt. Tuſc.

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of beings, and the properties flowing from thence. He every where abounds with definitions and diviſions.

Peter Corneille, on his ſide, having conſtantly practiſed the art for upwards of forty years, and examined as a philoſopher what was likely to pleaſe, or diſpleaſe in it; having by the effort of his genius, removed the obſtacles ariſing from ſeveral rebellious matters, and obſerved, as a metaphyſician, the path he had thus cleared for himſelf, and the means by which he had performed it; and laſtly, having thrown all his own reflections into the crucible of practice, together with the obſervations of thoſe who had gone before him, he well deſerves to have his ideas and deciſions reſpected, even were they not always exactly to agree with thoſe of Ariſtotle, who, after all, was acquainted with no other theatre than that of Athens; and if it is true, that the boldeſt geniuſes, in their ſpeculations on the arts, cannot go beyond the models which the firſt inventors in thoſe arts have handed down to them, the Greek philoſpher can therefore, at beſt, have given but the ideal beautiful of the Athenian ſtage.

But, on the other hand, if it is certain, that as ſoon as a new kind appears, like a phœnomenon in the literary ſyſtem, and has forcibly ſtruck the mind, it is ſoon brought to perfection, by the ardor of thoſe who are ſpurred on by the deſire

deſire of glory, one would believe that tragedy was at its height of perfection in thoſe Greek poets which ſerved as models to Ariſtotle, in framing his rules; and that thoſe that ſucceeded, have only added ſome few niceties, which may have even debaſed this kind of poetry, in endeavouring to give it the air of novelty.

Laſtly, another reaſon which may leſſen the authority of the French poet is, that he himſelf was an author; and it is an obſervation that all thoſe who have given rules, after having made works, however courageous they may appear to be, are at the bottom but timorous legiſlators. Like the father ſpoke of by Horace, or the lover of Agna, they will ſometimes take faults for beauties; or, if they know them to be faults, they ſpeak of them in ſuch a manner, and give them ſuch titles as come very near to thoſe of virtue.

CHAP. II.

What an heroic action is.

EVERY theatrical action, is ſomething undertaken by one man againſt another. It is properly the claſhing of intereſts, and conſequently of paſſions. Now this is moſt violent in the tragic action, as the intereſts are greater, and the oppoſition is made by very extraordinary powers, viz. that of heroes, or a ſet of men ſuperior

perior to the reſt of mankind, between themſelves.

What is meant by an heroic action.

With ſculptors, the ſtatue of a man is reckoned of a natural ſize, when it does not exceed ſix feet: it is heroic when it is between ſix and ten; and every thing beyond that is ſtiled a Coloſſus.

Now to follow this example by analogy; the tragic action is heroic, when it is the effect of a quality of the ſoul carried to any extraordinary degree, and to a certain pitch. If this action requires nothing but a common virtue, it can have no other merit than that of reſemblance; becauſe models of this kind are eaſily to be met with. If this action exceeds certain bounds, and goes beyond that degree of probability, of which every man has the ſtandard in his own ideas, then it becomes gigantic. The noble, the beautiful, the great, in a word, the heroic, are to be found in the middle way. It ſuppoſes a courage, valor, and generoſity, above the pitch of vulgar minds. Such is Heraclius in Corneille, who offers his own life to ſave that of Martian; ſuch Pulcheria, who, with a nobleneſs worthy her great birth, cries out to the uſurper Phocas,

Tiran, deſcens du trône, & fais place à ton maître.

The vices have a ſhare in the idea of this heroiſm of which we are ſpeaking. A ſtatuary may make a figure of Nero eight feet high; and a poet may deſcribe him, if not as a hero, at leaſt as a man of an extraordinary cruelty, and in ſome meaſure heroic; for in general even the vices are heroic, when they have for principle ſome quality which ſuppoſes a daringneſs and reſolution above the common ſtamp. Such is the undauntedneſs of a Catiline, or a Pierre, the reſolution of a Medea, and the intrepidity of Zanga in the Revenge, and of Cleopatra in Rodogune.

The action is heroic either in itſelf, or through the character of thoſe concerned in it.

It is heroic in itſelf when it has a grand object, as the acquiſition of a throne, or the puniſhment of a tyrant.

It is heroic by the character of its perſons; where there are kings or princes who act, or are acted againſt. When the undertaking is that of a king, it becomes raiſed and ennobled by the grandeur of the perſon who undertakes it: when againſt a king, it is ennobled by the greatneſs of him on whom it makes the attack.

It is beyond doubt, that a tragedy taken from low life might be exhibited on the ſtage. Every day furniſhes us with inſtances, in a middling ſtation, of very affecting events, and ſuch as are fit objects for poetic imitation. And it is not unlikely,

unlikely, that the major part of the ſpectators, being themſelves of the ſame ſphere with the unhappy perſon they behold ſuffer; it is not unlikely, I ſay, that this circumſtance may greatly conduce to move them to a ſympathetic feeling for ills, which they themſelves are not out of the reach of experiencing. However, as it is certain that we cannot properly put the comic dreſs on a king, nor buſkins on a citizen, tragedy cannot allow of degradation.

Indignatur enim privatis, ac prope ſocco
Dignis, carminibus narrari cœna Thyeſtæ.

Moreover, the object of the arts, which are all formed to embelliſh nature, being continually to look forwards to the great and noble, where can the tragic be found in perfection, but in kings alone? Not to mention their inſpiring us with humane and ſympathetic feelings for them, as being men, like ourſelves; the high rank in which they ſtand gives a double ſplendor to their fall. The ſpace they filled up by their greatneſs, ſeems to leave a greater void in the world. In a word, the idea of magnanimity and happineſs, which is generally attached to the name of royalty, infinitely heightens our terror and compaſſion. No ſkilful artiſt, then, will attempt to draw tears from us by any other ſubject than an heroic one, conſcious that he has an arduous taſk, even with thoſe helps.

The firſt qualification of the tragic action then is, that it be heroic. But this is not yet ſufficient, it muſt likewiſe be of a nature to excite terror and pity; this is its differential mark, and what renders it properly tragic. The epic treats of heroic actions as well as tragedy; but its chief end being to raiſe our aſtoniſhment and admiration, it only rouſes the ſoul a little, in order to raiſe her by degrees; and has none of thoſe violent ſhocks, thoſe ſtrokes of terror found in the theatre; it rather reſembles the level of manners, than the emotions of the paſſions.

CHAP. III.

What makes an action tragic.

WE are fully ſenſible how difficult an undertaking it is to analyze the paſſions, and to ſeparate the elements of which they are compoſed: the ſprings and receſſes of the heart are infinite, therefore we ſhall not attempt in this place, by forced deſcriptions, or even ſubtile definitions, to ſettle the exact degree and character of thoſe ſentiments which are requiſite to produce tragedy.

All the pleaſure, and all the pain, we experience at the repreſentation of a tragedy, is founded on this maxim: *Homo ſum; humani nihil à me alienum puto.* I am a man; and as ſuch, nothing that concerns mankind can be in-

different to me. It is the buſineſs of tragedy, then, to exhibit a man with all the ſenſible marks of human nature about him, in his paſſions, caprices, weakneſſes, and misfortunes; and to exhibit him in ſuch a light, as may be moſt likely to draw pity and terror.

Pity melts us into ſoftneſs, by ſhewing us our likeneſs in diſtreſs. Terror gives a check to the heart, and makes us dread for ourſelves the misfortunes we behold in others: but this apprehenſion is mingled with a certain pleaſing ſenſation, ariſing from the compariſon we make between our preſent condition, and that of the unhapppy object we ſee ſuffer.

Suave, mari magno turbantibus æquora ventis,
E terra magnum alterius ſpectare laborem;
Non quia vexari quemquam'ſt jucunda voluptas,
Sed, quibus ipſe malis careas, quia cernere ſuave'ſt.
LUCR. lib. II.

Although theſe paſſions may have in them ſomething of anger, envy, cruelty, deſpair, malice, indignation, yet are they entirely different in themſelves from every one of theſe. The ſhock of theſe latter are as deſtructive as death, and rather rend the heart aſunder than cauſe a gentle emotion in it. They may indeed appear in the actors, but then it is only to produce quite different ones in the audience. For it muſt be obſerved, that the ſentiments are not

the ſame in one as in the other: pride in the actor, produces envy in the ſpectator; cruelty, horror; grief, compaſſion; perfidy, indignation; and ſo on.

The diſtinguiſhing mark of tragedy then, is the ſpecies of ſentiment it produces, not what it includes.

If ſentiments, which do not properly belong to it, enter into the compoſition of thoſe which do; theſe latter muſt at leaſt predominate, and in ſome meaſure envelop and diſguiſe the others. What can be imagined more horrid, than the character, the perſon, and the crimes of Medea? She betrays her father; occaſions the death of Pelius, under the pretence of reſtoring him to youth; burns Creon, king of Corinth, and his daughter; cuts the throats of her own children, and exults over Jaſon when he ſtabs himſelf in deſpair. Here is ample matter to excite horror: but when we come to conſider the cauſe, though the horror of the action ſtill remains, yet ſhe becomes an object of our pity. Medea was in the right at the bottom, Jaſon in the wrong. Medea was in love; ſhe was betrayed in a cruel manner; ſhe grows furious upon it; and ſhe can do every thing by the power of her magic. Jaſon betrays her in cool blood, merely becauſe his paſſion for her is worn off. In ſuch a caſe, the injured fond-one ſeems to have a right to do any thing, and if ſhe is guilty

guilty of horrid actions, we deplore the neceſſity which reduced her to it. All her crimes have love for their ſource; and through a natural weakneſs, we are ready to look upon all that ſprings from thence as a misfortune. Thus the action at once excites our terror and our pity; for this reaſon it is truly tragic.

The tragedy that produces only one of theſe ſentiments, is imperfect; that which produces neither of them, cannot be a true tragedy; and that which produces them in a few paſſages only, is tragedy only in thoſe paſſages. What of tragedy is there, for example, in an action, which is undertaken by the command of a favorite miſtreſs againſt the perſon and crown of a tyrant, fails of ſucceſs, and at length terminates in a joyful reconciliation of the parties who were enemies? This is an heroic entertainment if you will, becauſe great intereſts are concerned, and kings themſelves are parties in it. But if there is nothing tragical in it, it certainly is not a true tragedy.

Let us now enquire in what the true tragic conſiſts, and, according to the implication of the word, makes a tragedy, and makes it more or leſs ſo.

It is evident that any action whatever, even the death of a perſon, conſidered in itſelf, is not tragic, and can be ſo only by its concurrent circumſtances, particularly thoſe relating to the

perſons: on this depends tragedy and its ſeveral degrees.

Theſe circumſtances depend on the perſon who acts, or the perſon who is acted againſt. Let us take a view of theſe two caſes, in one and the other kind.

The perſon who acts is, either thoroughly good, as Polyeuctes; or thoroughly wicked, as Atreus; or elſe between both, as Oedipus.

The enterpriſe of a good man ought to be itſelf good, otherwiſe that man is no longer good; that of a wicked man, bad, otherwiſe he is no longer a bad man. That of the man in the middle way, ſhould be good in itſelf, but attended or preceded by ſome circumſtance, which renders the actor blameable. For were the action to be neither good nor bad in itſelf, it would have no character. If only moderately good, or bad, it would have nothing of the heroic. If bad, it would then be properly the action of a bad man. It follows of courſe, that the action ſhould be good itſelf, but that of a man who has not always been good; or, at leaſt, is not ſo in ſome particular inſtances.

The enterpriſes of a virtuous man ought naturally to have an happy iſſue, and end in a joyful manner. Every mind has its innate and general laws of juſtice and decency, which are to be regarded as ſo many rules for the theatre; and however theſe may be relaxed or ſtraitned by

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the different modifications of ſelf-love, yet they will always remain the ſame at the bottom, ſo that it may be looked upon as certain, that we ſhall always find ourſelves attached to that character which appears the moſt noble, generous, and inclinable to juſtice. If the poet means to give us pleaſure, this muſt triumph; if he would affect us this muſt fall.

If one bad man triumphs over another, by the help of crimes or artifice, this is not tragical. The vanquiſhed deſerves no pity, the victor no congratulation: accordingly we meet with no ſuch ſort of ſubjects on the ſtage. One of the two parties is always good, at leaſt comparatively ſo, which determines our pity in his favor. Medea herſelf, the cruel the bloody Medea, in Corneille, is a much more intereſting character than Jaſon.

When a virtuous man triumphs over a wicked one, we feel a ſenſe of pleaſure, in proportion to the fears and anxieties we were under before. Thus Eſther undertakes to deliver her people, and puniſh a wicked oppreſſor. She ſucceeds in her attempt. But as inquietude in itſelf is not a tragic ſenſation, but only a kind of preparative thereto, when it happens to be ſucceeded by joy, the repreſentation in that caſe, has ſcarce any thing more than heroic in it. For this reaſon Ariſtotle aſſerts, that the unravelling

which is made by joy, belongs more properly to comedy than tragedy.

But can the puniſhment be called tragical, when a wicked perſon makes an attempt on a virtuous one, as Athaliah does upon Joad and the young Joas, and that we ſee innocence triumph in the fall of wickedneſs? No, certainly. That princeſs was an uſurper, who got the crown by a thouſand acts of parricide, and well deſerved the puniſhment ſhe met. But is the condition of Joad tragical? I cannot ſo ſafely anſwer in the negative here. He is obliged to come to cruel extremities with this woman; he is under a neceſſity of arming himſelf with reſolution to attack a haughty queen; his own fate, that of the young king, and of all the Levites, is at ſtake: moreover, the innocence of the youthful Joas affects us; all theſe circumſtances taken together, are certainly ſufficient to produce what we call the tragic.

But if a virtuous perſon, or at leaſt one rather virtuous than vicious, falls a victim to the execution of their duty, as is the caſe of the Curiatii; or of their own weakneſs, as Ariadne and Phedra; or to the weakneſs of another, as Polyeuctes; or to the prepoſſeſſion and overſight of a father, as does Hypolitus; or if ſuch a perſon falls into a diſtreſs there was no means of avoiding, as Andromache; or is carried away by an irreſiſtible fatality, to which all mankind is alike

ſubject,

ſubject, as Oedipus. In all theſe caſes we have the true tragic; we feel our inmoſt ſoul wounded, and torrents of tears are drawn from our eyes. If this is accompanied with an atrociouſneſs in the action, a ſhew of greatneſs and ſplendor, or a dignity of perſonages, then it becomes heroic as well as tragic, and produces in us a ſcene of compaſſion mixed with terror, at ſeeing men, and men more great, more powerful, and more perfect than ourſelves, ſink beneath the weight of miſeries natural to human kind. We have the pleaſure of the emotion, an emotion which does not go ſo far as grief (for grief is the ſentiment of a perſon who ſuffers) but ſtops juſt at the point it ſhould do to render it a pleaſure.

Hitherto we have conſidered chiefly the perſons who act, and not thoſe who are acted againſt. Theſe have likewiſe a power of conſiderably augmenting the tragic.

If an indifferent man kills another man in a flight of paſſion, it is a misfortune. There is only an inſtantaneous check of the paſſions. This is not wherewithal to form a tragedy upon. Oedipus kills an unknown perſon, a ſtranger; this is homicide: the action is really bad; but it is a common accident, which no way affects or troubles the hearts of thoſe, to whom the ſtory is related.

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One enemy kills another; here is room to diſplay a number of fine ſentiments. Vengeance is tragical in itſelf, when it makes uſe of cruel means to attain its purpoſe. It forms its deſigns, conceals them for a while, till every thing is ripe for execution, and then lets them break forth in all their force. In this light, the revenge Medea takes on Jaſon, is a ſubject truly tragical. For, in this kind of tragic action, we do not conſider whether the perſon attacked has ſuffered too great a puniſhment; it is ſufficient that he has deſerved to be puniſhed. And indeed, if we reflect that it is a paſſion that puniſhes, it ſhould ſomewhat tranſgreſs the common limits to become truly tragic. However, I do not think it ſhould be carried ſo far, as to make a father drink the blood of his own ſon; this is no longer terror, it becomes horror.

When one enemy attacks another, and does not kill him, he ought to fall himſelf, otherwiſe the ſubject is not tragical. A vengeance which is ſtopped in its career, through reſpect, or admiration of ſome great virtue, is rather epic than tragical. Athaliah makes an attempt on Joas. She is unable to compaſs his deſtruction, but periſhes herſelf in the attempt: this is a circumſtance obſerved by moſt good writers of tragedy. It is not ſufficient that the paſſions go a great length, they muſt either break through the obſtacles in their way, or deſtroy themſelves

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in the attempt, otherwiſe they will excite neither our terror nor our pity.

Laſtly, when two friends attack each other, the caſe may be varied three ways. Firſt, either the one believes the other his enemy, and is not undeceived till after he has killed him; or elſe, ſecondly, he diſcovers his miſtake at the very inſtant he is about to kill him.

If one friend is killed by another, if the ſon kills his father, or the father his ſon, nothing can be more affecting and tender. If the ſacrifice is not abſolutely made, the lucky and critical diſcovery has a great effect; the dread cauſed by the impending danger, the joy of having eſcaped it, with the pleaſure of recovering a father, a brother, or a ſon, form all together a kind of complicated ſentiment, which fills the whole ſoul with tranſport and ſatisfaction.

The third ſtate of the caſe is, when one friend attacks another, knowing him to be ſuch, and that ſome powerful ſuperior reaſon obliges him to make a ſacrifice of a ſon, a brother, a father, and a lover. Examples of this kind we meet with in the Cid, the Horatii, and Polyeuctes. And this is a kind of ſecond degree of tragedy, in which Corneille has diſtinguiſhed him above any of his brother tragedians. In other caſes indeed, we ſee a great ſtruggle of the paſſions, but then it is in different perſons: ſuch as Athaliah armed againſt Joas, Eſther againſt Haman,

or

or Cinna againſt Auguſtus: but here the conteſt is in the ſame perſon, and the ſame breaſt, which produces an infinitely more lively ſenſation, and renders agitation more violent. Thus Rodrigo is deſperately in love, and his duty obliges him to kill the father of his miſtreſs. He kills him, Chimene is obliged to purſue Rodrigo to death, the lover ſhe adores. The conflict is intereſting: two paſſions, each greatly heroic, diſtract the ſame heart, which of theſe now ſhall triumph? According to the laws of decorum the nobleſt ought to carry it. Love ſhould be ſacrificed to glory, life to religion, otherwiſe we ſhall have a ſet of whining heroes, whoſe examples rather enervate, than exalt or fortify the ſoul.

It is not neceſſary to ſpill blood, in order to excite the tragic ſentiment. The condition of Ariadne deſerted by Theſeus in the iſle of Naxos, and Philoctetes in that of Lemnos, are really tragical, becauſe either ſituation is full as deplorable as death itſelf; and conveys the moſt dreadful ideas of grief, deſpair, dejection, and, in ſhort, of every ill that can attend the human heart, all centered in one perſon.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

The origin of tragedy.

GREECE has been the fountain of all the polite arts, with her then we muſt naturally look for the origin of dramatic poetry. The Greeks were in general born with a happy genius, and having that taſte which is natural to all men, of ſeeing extraordinary things, and feeling that kind of inquietude which always accompanies thoſe who have wants, and ſeek to have them ſatisfied, they were the moſt likely people to exert themſelves in eſſays towards attaining a knowledge of the drama; but the ſucceſs they met with was owing neither to their genius nor their reſearches.

Every one agrees, that the feaſts of Bacchus firſt gave riſe to this ſpecies of poetry. Bacchus was the god of mirth and wine, and patron of the vintage. This deity had ſeveral feaſts inſtituted to his honour both in town and country, in the celebration of which his votaries ſtrove to excel each other. At theſe feaſts they ſacrificed a goat, and during the ſolemnity the prieſts and people in chorus, ſang an hymn to the honor of the god, which from the name of the victim was called *tragodie*, or the *ſong of the goat*, τράγος ᾠδή. Theſe ſongs were not confined to the temple only, they went ſinging them up and down the ſtreets.

ſtreets. A man dreſſed like Silenus, and mounted on an aſs, was led about the town, followed by numbers of the inhabitants ſinging and dancing. Others, daubed with the lees of wine, and mounted in a cart, with a goblet in their hand, were quavering out the praiſes of the god of good fellows. In this rough ſketch we have the traces of a licentious mirth, joined with the performance of a religious duty; the ſerious and the frolic appear together; religious hymns and bacchanal ſongs, the dance and the entertainment. From this chaos aroſe dramatic poetry.

Theſe hymns were only a kind of lyric air, like thoſe deſcribed in the Eneid, where Virgil has, in all appearance, deſcribed the ſacrifice of Evander, according to the notion they had in his time of the choruſſes of the ancients. A portion of the people (the old men, the youths, women, maidens, according to the deity whoſe feaſts they were celebrating) ranged themſelves in two rows, and ſang alternately the ſeveral couplets of which the hymn was compoſed, till the whole was finiſhed. Sometimes the two rows of ſingers joined together in the ſong, ſometimes they were accompanied by every one preſent, which made a little variety. But as it was always a ſong, there was a kind of monotony prevailed in it, which at length wearied the aſſiſtants.

It

It was then judged proper to throw a little variety into it, and to that purpoſe an actor was introduced to make ſome kind of narration. Theſpis was the firſt who fell upon this new method. His actor, who doubtleſs at firſt recited the actions commonly attributed to Bacchus, gave great pleaſure to all the ſpectators. But the poet began quickly to enter into other ſubjects, which were foreign to this god, and theſe were likewiſe approved by the greateſt part of the people. At length he divided this recital into ſeveral different parts, in order to divide the ſong, by breaking in upon it here and there, and by this variation to encreaſe the pleaſure of the audience.

But one actor was not ſufficient: there wanted a ſecond to conſtitute the drama, and form what is called dialogue. However the firſt ſtep was taken, and that was doing a great deal.

Eſchylus, taking advantage of the path that was cut out for him by Theſpis, preſently formed the heroic drama, or tragedy. He introduced two actors inſtead of one. He made them undertake an action, which he filled with every thing he found to his purpoſe in the epic, ſuch as the expoſition, the plot, the conduct, the unravelling the paſſions and intereſts. When once he had entered into the notion of throwing the epic into a drama, the reſt followed of itſelf. He now furniſhed his actors with characters,

ters, manners, and a proper elocution; the chorus, which in the original had been the baſis of the entertainment, became now only an acceſſary, and ſerved but as a kind of interlude to the action, as the action had formerly been to the chorus.

As admiration was the paſſion produced by the epic, ſo that terror and pity were thoſe properly belonging to tragedy, was evident, by comparing a piece wherein theſe paſſions were found, with another which produced only horror, dread, hatred, or admiration ſingly. The leaſt reflection made on the effect ariſing from the trial of this ſentiment, or even independent of this, the tears and applauſe of the ſpectators, were enough to give the firſt tragic poets a hint of what ſubjects were really ſuited to exerciſe their art upon; and to which of them they ought to give the preference. In all probability Eſchylus made this obſervation, the firſt time he had the opportunity of ſeeing the experiment made.

Such was the birth and origin of tragedy. Let us now examine its progreſs, and the different ſtates it has paſſed through, in following the different taſte and genius of authors and people.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

Characters of the principal authors in tragedy.

Of the Greeks.

ESCHYLUS.

ESCHYLUS lived in the year of the world 3508, or near 400 years before Chriſt; tragedy with him has a gigantic air, its features are rough, and its gait impetuous and fiery. This was tragedy in its infancy, well conformed in all its parts, but as yet deſtitute of that poliſh, which art and time beſtow on every new invention; it yet wanted to be reduced to a certain fixed truth, which future poets ſhould be obliged to follow, even in fiction. To accompliſh this was the lot of Sophocles,*

SOPHOCLES.

This poet, who flouriſhed in the year of the world 3532, or 350 years before Chriſt, was born with a happy turn for this ſpecies of poetry, poſſeſſed a vaſt fund of genius, an exquiſite delicacy taſte, and a marvellous facility of expreſſion: he was the firſt who reduced the tragic muſe to the rules of decency and truth, and taught her to proceed in a noble and aſſured manner, without

* Longé clarius illuſtraverunt hoc opus Sophocles atque Euripides: quorum in diſpari dicendi vi uter ſit poeta melior, inter plurimos queritur. QUINTIL. lib. 10. c. 1.

that

that pride, parade, and gigantic haughtineſs, which are ſo diſtant from the true heroic. Sophocles found means to give the chorus a ſhare of intereſt in the whole action; and wrought up his verſe with great care; in a word, he raiſed himſelf to ſuch a pitch, by his own excellent genius, and unwearied labor, that his works are now become the pattern of what is truly beautiful, and the model for all rules.

EURIPIDES.

Euripides appeared at the ſame time with Sophocles; he was born at Salamis the very day Xerxes's army was defeated; he was originally much addicted to philoſophy, in which ſtudy he had Anaxagoras for a maſter. From hence are derived thoſe excellent maxims, and rules for the conduct of manners, which are found every where in his pieces. Socrates never failed being preſent when any new piece of his made its appearance. He is tender, pathetic, and truly tragical, though his writings are not quite ſo lofty and nervous as thoſe of Sophocles. He was crowned but five times; but the inſtance we have in the famous poet, to whom the judges always preferred one Philemon,* is a ſufficient

* Philemon, pravis ſui temporis judiciis Menandro ſæpe prælatus eſt: conſenſu omnium qui meruit credi ſecundus.
QUINTIL. lib. 10. c. 1.

proof,

proof, that theſe rewards were not always diſtributed agreeable to juſtice. He died before Sophocles, being torn to pieces by wild dogs in the ſeventy-fifth year of his age. The number of tragedies he compoſed equalled the years of his life.

The Greek tragedy is in general ſimple, natural, and very eaſy to apprehend, as being ſo little complicated. The action is laid, wove, and unravelled without any efforts; art ſeems to have the leaſt ſhare in it; and from that very circumſtance it is the maſter-piece of art and genius.

We may form ſome judgment of this from an analyſis of the Oedipus of Sophocles, with which we ſhall now preſent the reader, after having conſidered a little the fund which this poet was furniſhed with in hiſtory.

An analyſis of the Oedipus of Sophocles.

The city of Thebes having been laid waſte by a plague, it was judged neceſſary to conſult the Delphian oracle thereupon; who returned for anſwer, that they muſt revenge the death of Laius upon Oedipus, who was his ſon and murderer. The oracle was verified, for it was diſcovered at laſt that Oedipus, having been expoſed by the orders of his parents, but preſerved by certain ſhepherds, had been brought up at Corinth, and afterwards killed his father, and married his mother. Jocaſta, the mother and

wife

wife of Oedipus, hang'd herſelf in deſpair, and Oedipus tore out his own eyes. This is the plan on which Sophocles has built his fable. And the manner in which he has raiſed it is as follows.

Act I. At the opening of the ſcene there appears a public place before the king's palace, with temples raiſed on each ſide. The people requeſt the king to find ſome remedy for the evils they groan under. He tells them he has ſent Creon to conſult the gods, and is every inſtant in expectation of his return. Creon enters with an apparent air of ſatisfaction, and informs them of the oracle's commands, to puniſh the murderers of Laius. The king makes a reſolution to leave nothing undone towards the diſcovery of thoſe murderers: this is the matter of the firſt act.

Here we have a clear expoſition of the ſubject. Firſt, the diſtreſs of Thebes and its inhabitants are ſet forth by the high prieſt, who ſpeaks for the reſt of the people. Secondly, the cauſe of theſe misfortunes is explained by Creon, when he reports the anſwer given by the oracle. Thirdly, the remedy to theſe evils is found diſpoſed and prepared in the diligence and reſolution of the king. Nothing can be more natural than the whole of this proceeding, and the conſequent diſpoſition.

Act

Act II. Oedipus appears again. He pronounces before-hand the edict againſt the murderer of Laius, and then exhorts his people to yield him all aſſiſtance in detecting the criminal, and bringing him to puniſhment. Juſt then arrives Tireſias the interpreter of the gods, whom Oedipus is ſuppoſed to have ſent for. The king puts the queſtion to him, which he refuſes to anſwer: Upon which, Oedipus flies into a violent paſſion, and threatens him in theſe terms. "Thou worſt of fellows thou would'ſt "enrage the hardeſt rocks; wilt thou tell us "nothing? Art thou ſo inexorable and mo-"roſe in thy anger?"* After ſeveral repeated invectives of this kind, the prophet, being piqued, makes this reply. "Do you talk in this man-"ner to me? why then I declare that you are "obnoxious to thoſe imprecations you have "pronounced; and that from this preſent day "you are neither permitted to ſpeak to me, nor "any of thy ſubjects; but that we ought all to "look upon you as a monſter, which draws "down upon this land the wrath of heaven."

Tireſias then proceeds to diſcover to the king, in general terms, all that concerns him. Oedipus imagines this to be a plot of Creon his brother-in-law, with deſign to make his way to the

* This, and what follows of this tragedy, is taken from the Rev. Mr. Adams's tranſlation of Sophocles.

throne

throne by his death; as he can ſee no reaſon why theſe reproaches of Tireſias ſhould in the leaſt affect him. Thus ends the ſecond act.

In this manner does the action proceed. Oedipus has been told he is the guilty perſon, but diſbelieves it for the following ſubſtantial reaſons. Firſt, his conſcience reproaches him with no part of this accuſation. Secondly, Tireſias was in a rage when he ſpoke theſe words: now paſſion often violates the truth. Thirdly, Creon was jealous to ſee a ſtranger, as Oedipus was, on the throne of Thebes; and it was by his advice that he had ſent for Tireſias; a circumſtance, which was more than ſufficient to render this latter ſuſpected. Accordingly the chorus concludes, that no belief is to be given to the prophet. However, this firſt attempt of the king creates him a conſiderable uneaſineſs. He accuſes Creon; he himſelf is accuſed by Tireſias. This is at beſt a very diſagreeable diſcuſſion. In the firſt act Oedipus appears as the good and juſt king; now he becomes harſh, violent, and ſuſpicious.

Act III. Creon makes his complaints to the people, and deſires to know whether it is true that the king has accuſed him. They do not conceal it from him. Oedipus comes in upon them; Creon juſtifies himſelf; but the king grows more enraged: at length the queen enters and endeavours to quiet them. Creon retires; and

and Jocaſta, in order to make Oedipus quite eaſy, who had been complaining to her of his being accuſed as the murderer of Laius, tells him, that he ſhould credit neither Tireſias, nor even Apollo himſelf, were he to tell him ſo; for the oracle had foretold, that Laius ſhould be killed by his own ſon, and that ſon had died ſoon after he was born; and that Laius himſelf had been murdered by thieves, in a place where, according to report, three great roads met.

Theſe laſt words, ſpoke without deſign, create great uneaſineſs in Oedipus. He aſks freſh queſtions, he enquires into circumſtances; theſe only ſerve to prove to him too clearly, that he is himſelf the author of the murder committed in that place. One thing, however, yet remains to ſatisfy him; which is, the report that ſeveral were concerned in the murder of Laius, whereas Oedipus was alone when he did it. He is told, that the ſtory came from an officer of the houſhold, who was well acquainted with all the circumſtances, and that this officer now lives retired in the country. Oedipus immediately commands him to be brought before him, that he may learn from himſelf a circumſtance ſo important to his preſent and future quiet.

In the mean time he relates to Jocaſta, that while he was at the court of Polybus, king of Corinth, he had one day been reproached with not being the ſon of that prince, and not having been

able to get this point cleared up by the king, he went to Delphos, to conſult the oracle there; that the oracle, inſtead of giving a ſatisfactory anſwer to his queſtion, had told him, that he ſhould kill his father, and eſpouſe his mother. In order to prevent, if poſſible, this diſaſter, he had taken the reſolution of returning no more to Corinth; and that in his way to Thebes, he had met with a man, juſt ſuch as Laius had been deſcribed, with whom he had a diſpute, and in the end killed him, and ſome of his retinue; that when this happened he was by himſelf, therefore if Laius had really been killed by a number of people in company, he doubtleſs could not be the perſon that murdered him. This is the third act.

Every thing here is in the utmoſt agitation. The fate of the king depends on the depoſition of one man, who, in all probability, will give it againſt him. The queen has related one ſtory, the king another; theſe two recitals have let the audience into every thing that was neceſſary for them to know, in order to be properly affected with an event of this nature. The circumſtances relating to the murder of Laius, all agree perfectly in time, place, and reſemblance of perſons: there is only one ſlight doubt remaining, and that is to know whether the murderer was alone or not. And the more important this queſtion is, the greater is the impatience of having

ving it cleared up. But there is yet another which has been propoſed, which is to know who are the real parents of Oedipus. He is intirely ignorant on this head. The dreadful oracles againſt him begin now to be in ſome meaſure accompliſhed: we tremble at the proſpect of his ſituation.

Act IV. Opens with Jocaſta in great diſorder, preparing for a ſacrifice. "Oedipus (ſays "ſhe) torments his ſoul with a numberleſs "train of black and alarming thoughts. He "no longer poſſeſſes that ſolid mind which "was wont to judge of the future by the paſt, "by making a proper uſe of reaſon. He now "gives himſelf up a prey to every babler, that "will but fill his ears with tales of horror."

A meſſenger arrives from Corinth with an account of the death of king Polybus. Jocaſta is partly tranquillized, as ſhe thinks the oracle is now proved to be falſe at leaſt in one circumſtance, and immediately ſends to acquaint Oedipus of the pleaſing news. He no longer dreads being the murderer of his father; but is ſtill in apprehenſion of becoming the inceſtuous partner of his mother's bed. The Corinthian, in hopes of quieting his apprehenſions, informs him, that the queen of Corinth was not his mother, nor Polybus his father; and then relates to him the manner of his having received him an infant from the hands of a

ſhepherd on mount Citheron. Here follows a part of this dialogue.

" SHEP. What do you fear leſt the diſcovery " of who are your parents ſhould ſtain your " innocence?

" OED. It is that which perpetually affrights " me.

" SHEP. But be aſſured you put yourſelf in " fear without juſt cauſe.

" OED. Why? If I am the ſon of thoſe " parents.

" SHEP. Therefore I inform you that Poly- " bus was not your father.

" OED. What haſt thou ſaid? Was not " Polybus my father?

" SHEP. No more than I am, but even " alike.

" OED. But how is he who begat me no fa- " ther?

" SHEP. Neither did he beget you, nor I.

" OED. Why then did he call me his ſon?

" SHEP. Know that he received you as a " gift from my hands.

" OED. Did he ſo cheriſh what he received " from another hand?

" SHEP. The want of children engaged him " to do it.

" OED. Did you buy me? Or was I your " ſon?

" SHEP.

" SHEP. I found you on the top of mount
" Citheron.

" OED. Why did you travel over thoſe
" places?

" SHEP. There I had the care of ſome flocks.

" OED. Then you was a ſhepherd therefore?

" SHEP. My lord, I ſaved your life in that
" time.

" OED. In what ſtate did you find me?

" SHEP. Your pierced feet may witneſs that.

" OED. Alas for me! What old accident is
" that you mention?

" SHEP. I will eaſe you of your doubt, the
" ends of your feet were bored through."

Oedipus, by this time, perceives that this ſhepherd is the very ſame perſon he ſent for. Jocaſta, who is acquainted with all the remaining part of the ſtory, is for preventing the king from purſuing his enquiries. Oedipus, miſtaking her reaſons, imagines it is leſt ſhe ſhould find herſelf diſhonored in the baſe birth of him who is her huſband. He is determined to know the whole. The queen, unable to ſtand the fatal diſcovery, goes off, and leaves Oedipus with the Chorus, who caſts ſeveral ſevere reflections on the character and conduct of Jocaſta. Now the old officer arrives, and there enſues the moſt dreadful ſcene that ever filled a ſtage. Oedipus begins interrogating him thus:

ACT IV. SCENE V.

OEDIPUS, Shepherd of CORINTH, PHORBAS, CHORUS.

" OED. Approach, old man, and anſwer to " what I ſhall aſk you. Didſt thou once " belong to Laius?

" PHOR. I was his ſervant, not bought, but " brought up in his family.

" OED. What buſineſs did you follow?

" PHOR. I had the care of his flocks for " the moſt part of my life.

" OED. In what places was you ordinarily " converſant?

" PHOR. On mount Citheron, and other " places thereto adjoining.

" OED. Do you know this man? Have you " never ſeen him any where?

" PHOR. In what employment? what man " do you mean?

" OED. He, who is before our eyes, did you " ever meet with him any where?

" PHOR. I do not remember that ever I ſaw " him in my life.

" SHEP. It is no wonder, my lord, but I will " quickly bring to his remembrance things " which he hath forgot: for I know well that " he knows me; on Citheron he fed two " flocks, and I but one, and we paſſed together

" three

" three* whole ſucceſſive ſeaſons from the be-
" ginning of Spring to the end of Autumn;
" but at the approach of Winter, I drove mine
" into my ſtables, but he drove his into thoſe
" of Laius. Do I ſay the truth, or do I not?

" PHOR. You ſay what is true; I remember
" it, tho' it be a long time ago.

" SHEP. Speak, tell me; do you remember
" that you gave me a certain infant, that I
" ſhould bring it up as my own?

" PHOR. What is it you ſay? Why do you
" aſk that queſtion?

" SHEP. This, my friend, is that ſame in-
" fant.

" PHOR. Curſes light on thee, thou wretch,
" wilt thou not be ſilent?

" OED. O do not chaſtiſe him, it is you who
" deſerve chaſtiſement rather than he.

" PHOR. My lord, wherein do I offend?

" OED. In not ſpeaking of that infant of
" whom he enquires.

" PHOR. He knows not what he ſays, but
" amuſeth you unprofitably.

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* *Three whole ſucceſſive ſeaſons,*] The Greek is, τρεῖς ὅλους ἐμμινοὺς χρόνους. That the ſenſe I have given of this paſſage is right, not three whole months, as it is in moſt editions, is plain from hence; that from the Spring to the riſing of Arcturus, which is about the beginning of October, much exceeds three months; and from the Spring to the ſetting thereof, are reckoned the three other ſeaſons of the year, *i. e.* Spring, Summer, and Autumn.

" OED. You will not ſpeak for favour, but " tortures ſhall make you ſpeak.

" PHOR. No, by the gods, do not ſo affront " my age.

" OED. Will not ſomebody quickly bind his " hands?

" PHOR. Ah me a wretch! Why? What " would you know?

" OED. Did you give that infant to him " whom he mentions?

" PHOR. I gave it to him, but wiſh that that " had been the laſt day of my life!

" OED. Wiſh not for death; if you will " not tell me the truth, that ſhall be your por- " tion.

" PHOR. But much more if I ſpeak, I pe- riſh.

" OED. This man, it ſeems, is only for de- " laying.

" PHOR. Not I, my lord; but I have told " that I gave it to him.

" OED. Whence did you receive him? Was " he yours, or did you receive him of another?

" PHOR. He was not mine, but I received " him of another.

" OED. But from which of the citizens, and " from what houſe did you receive him?

" PHOR. By the gods, ſir, enquire no more.

" OED.

" OED. You are a dead man, if I aſk you
" again.

" PHOR. He was of the family of Laius.

" OED. Whether was he his ſon, or one of
" his ſervants?

" PHOR. Wo is me! Cruel neceſſity en-
" forces me to ſpeak.

" OED. And me to hear, but yet I muſt
" hear it.

" PHOR. He was called his child. The
" queen can better tell than I, whoſe he is.

" OED. Did ſhe give him to you?

" PHOR. Yes, my lord.

" OED. For what end?

" PHOR. That I ſhould kill him.

" OED. Miſerable woman, the child ſhe
" bore, for what reaſon?

" PHOR. From the fear of an unfortunate
oracle.

" OED. What oracle.

" PHOR. The oracle was, that he ſhould kill
" his parents.

" OED. Then why did you give him to this
" old man?

" PHOR. Out of pity, my lord, and I
" thought to ſend him into another country;
" but he, in ſaving your life, reſerved you for
" numberleſs evils; and if you are he whom
" he ſpeaks of, the world cannot produce a
" more unhappy man.

" OED. *Alas! alas! all things are come
" out plain. O ſun! whoſe radiant beams en-
" lighten the earth, this is the laſt time I be-
" hold thee, who am born of thoſe of whom I
" ſhould not; who have converſed carnally
" with her from whoſe loathed embraces na-
" ture commanded me to fly, and have ſlain
" with my curſed hand thoſe who gave me
" being."

Every thing is now diſcovered by confronting the two ſhepherds. Oedipus finds himſelf guilty of all the horrid crimes with which the oracle had menaced him; nothing now remains but to ſee him puniſhed in the fifth act.

Act V. An officer of the palace relates what has paſſed there. The queen has killed herſelf; Oedipus having no arms to kill himſelf with,

* *Alas! alas! all things are now come out plain.*] This recognition is what Ariſtotle calls the moſt beautiful of all, becauſe it is accompanied with a change of fortune, or peripetia: For it is no ſooner made, but Oedipus falls from happineſs to miſery. CAP. XI. ART. POET. " The beſt recognition " is that which is found with the peripetia, as in the Oedipus, " for that will produce either compaſſion, or terror, of which " tragedy is an imitation on this paſſage." Mr. Dacier hath theſe following remarks. " This reaſon is drawn from this " general principle, that tragedy is the imitation of an action; " and not only of an action, but of ſuch an action which ex- " cites pity and fear; and this is found in that recognition " which he prefers to the reſt: there is action, ſince it makes " the good or ill fortune of the principal perſonages; and it " can't fail of exciting terror and compaſſion, ſince in one and " the ſame moment it decides things of ſo great importance, " and produces ſuch grand effects."

has

has dug out his eyes with one of the claſps of Jocaſta's robe, and is filling the palace with the moſt piercing cries.

"Ah cruel deſtiny, remorſeleſs fate! Alas! "Wretch that I am, whither wander my ſteps? "whither ſpread my piercing cries?---O cloud "of darkneſs, fearful and horrid, oh dreary "privation of the chearful light; never, never, "never more to be reſtored! O Citheron, "why didſt thou receive me? Why when "you had received me did you not ſuffer me "to periſh? O Polybus! O Corinth! O "antient palace, ſaid to be that of my anceſ-"tors, you have brought me up, under a hu-"man form, a monſter, who am a reproach "to nature."

Creon enters, and upbraids Oedipus in a harſh manner, but at length permits him to take his laſt farewel of his children; after this he is conducted back to the palace, and ſo the piece ends.

The action of this tragedy is, *Oedipus convicted and puniſhed.* The manner in which this action is carried on, is ſingular and intereſting: *he is convicted and puniſhed by himſelf*, while he is ſeeking to puniſh others.

This action is one and entire: the buſineſs is to puniſh a perſon that is criminal, and that alone.

It is heroic, for a king is ſacrificed to the welfare of his people. It is true indeed, that he does not ſacrifice himſelf of his own proper motion; and therefore the action is not heroic in its principle, as not being produced by a remarkable virtue. But again, it is heroic in its effects and conſequences: a king periſhes, a people are ſaved; theſe are great and noble objects. It is ſo likewiſe from the condition of the actors, who are princes, kings, and prieſts.

The action is moving, and that in a tragical degree. Tragedy contains the terrible and the piteous, or in other words, terror and pity. Terror is a lively ſenſe of one's own weakneſs on the proſpect of impending danger: it is a ſentiment between fear and deſpair. Fear lets us perceive, though confuſedly, the means of avoiding the danger that threatens. Deſpair precipitates us into the midſt of it. But terror overwhelms, oppreſſes, and in a manner even annihilates the ſoul, and deprives it totally of the uſe of its faculties: it can neither ſhun nor ruſh on to the danger. Now it is preciſely this ſentiment that occaſions all the diſtreſs of Oedipus. In him we ſee a man born under an unhappy planet, conſtantly purſued by his fate, and led into the greateſt misfortunes by a train of ſeeming ſucceſſes. I cannot be of opinion with one of our greateſt wits, that this cataſtrophe

phe is a thunder-clap that creates our horror; it appears to me rather a repreſentation of the miſeries incident to humanity, which affects us with dread and apprehenſion. Where is the man, who, if unfortunate, does not attribute at leaſt the moſt part of his misfortunes to his unhappy ſtar? We are all of us fully perſuaded that we are not maſters of our own deſtiny; but are guided by a ſuperior power that very often over-rules us; in which reſpect the ſtory of Oedipus is only an aſſemblage of misfortunes, of which the cauſe has one time or other, and in ſome degree, been experienced by the greateſt part of mankind. Hence the man, conſcious of his own weakneſs, and ignorance of futurity, and full of the ſenſe of an over-ruling deity, does, in beholding this piece, tremble for himſelf, and lament Oedipus: this is the other part of tragedy; it is pity, which naturally accompanies terror, when raiſed in us by the misfortunes of another.

We are alarmed at the misfortunes of another, only becauſe we find a parity of condition between the unhappy perſon and ourſelves; it is the ſame nature that ſuffers both in the actor and the ſpectator. Thus the action of Oedipus being terrible, it is at the ſame time an object of pity, and conſequently is tragical; and highly ſo! This man has committed the blackeſt crimes, killed his father, and wedded his mother,

mother; he is at once the father and brother of his children; he diſcovers this, and finds himſelf convicted in the inſtant of his greateſt ſecurity: his wife, who is at the ſame time his mother, ſtrangles herſelf, and he tears out his own eyes in the height of his deſpair: it is not poſſible for an action to contain greater ſubjects for grief and pity.

The firſt act unfolds the ſubject; the ſecond raiſes our anxiety; in the third this anxiety increaſes, and becomes real concern; the fourth is terrible: "Here am I ready to declare the "moſt dreadful things. And I to hear them." The fifth act is full of tears.

Beſides this, each act has a kind of under or leſſer action. In the firſt act it is reſolved to make ſtrict ſearch and enquiry after the murderer of Laius; in the ſecond Oedipus is accuſed; in the third he is almoſt convicted; in the fourth he is convicted of the whole of what the oracle had foretold; in the fifth he is puniſhed.

Of theſe five leſſer actions, the firſt requires nothing to follow it: the others require ſomething to precede and follow them; thus taken all together, they form one finiſhed compleat whole, *teres & rotundus*, of a juſt extent, and in which nothing is wanting, nor is there any thing ſuperfluous.

This

This action is quite ſimple and uncomplicated. The intrigue lies in the difficulty of diſcovering the aſſaſſin of Laius. The unravelling is complex, as being made partly by diſcovery, and partly by *peripetia*. Jocaſta and Oedipus diſcover each other, and this diſcovery works a change in their condition, and from happy that it was before, renders it miſerable: this is the tragic *peripetia*. When the perſons from unhappy that they were before, become happy in the end, as in Cinna, the peripetia is not tragic.

The tragedy before us, is the beſt model we can have for judging of Greek tragedies in general. Its characters are for the moſt part rather true than heroic. Oedipus appears a common man, his virtues and his vices have nothing in them of a ſuperior order. The ſame may be remarked of Jocaſta and Creon. Tireſias ſpeaks in a high-ſpirited manner, but ſimply, and without any ſwell. Far from reproaching the Greeks with this diſpoſition in their tragedies, we ought rather to envy them. We now-a-days are accuſtomed to ſee a parade of pompous paſſages, and characters ſtretched beyond human nature, which is only meant to hide the real defects of a piece, that, ſtript of theſe ornaments would have very little beauty left. We deck Helen in a gorgeous manner; the Greeks exhibited her in all her beauty.

They

They were poſſeſſed of a genius able to carry on an action, capable of furniſhing matter for five acts, without calling in any thing foreign to the ſubject, or leaving out any thing neceſſary to it. Nature abundantly ſupplied them with all they needed. As for us, we are obliged to employ the aſſiſtence of art, and to hunt for, and force a ſubject, which often proves refractory to all our endeavours; and when, with great pains and labor, we have reduced the matter, forced as it is, to ſome ſort of ſyſtem and order, we have ſometimes the vanity to ſay, we have more art than the Greeks! Our genius, our powers exceed theirs!

Every act finiſhes with a ſong in the lyric manner, which expreſſes the ſentiments produced by the foregoing act, and is preparatory to that which is to follow. Racine has imitated this practice in his Eſther and Athaliah.*

Characters of the Latin authors in tragedy.

SENECA.

What Latin authors are now extant in this branch, are by no means worthy to enter into competition with the Greeks.

Seneca has handled the ſtory of Oedipus in imitation of Sophocles. But with this diffe-

* As Shakeſpear has likewiſe done in many of his tragedies.

rence,

rence, that as the fable of the Greek poet is a well proportioned regular body, that of the Roman is a monſtrous Coloſſus, abounding with ſuperfetations. One may ſtrike out upwards of eight hundred verſes of which the action has no kind of need. His firſt act opens with a converſation between Jocaſta and Oedipus on the cares and troubles of a throne. Then the Chorus deſcribes, in a declamatory manner, the deſolation occaſioned by the plague; and this is the whole of the firſt act.

Creon is next introduced, without any preparation, as bringing with him the decree of the oracle. Tireſias, without being ſent for, enters, together with his daughter, in order to ſacrifice an heifer and a bull, intended as emblems of the fate of Jocaſta and Oedipus. But this ſacrifice is not enough; the infernal deities are to be conſulted in their own realms, and Creon, who has been a witneſs of the whole, makes a deſcription, eighty verſes long, of the place, and the horrors that ſurround it; all this before he ſays a word about the anſwer he brings from the oracle.

In the fourth act, Oedipus puts ſeveral queſtions to Jocaſta: he begins to ſuſpect himſelf the guilty perſon; and at length is aſſured of it by the ſhepherd who comes from Corinth, and the old domeſtic of Laius. The fifth act gives a relation of the rage of a deſperate king,

whoſe

whoſe misfortunes are ſung by the Chorus, and Jocaſta and Oedipus diſcourſe together on their common diſtreſs; the king retires into exile, in order to remove, by this voluntary deed, the famine, plague, and miſery, in which his crimes had involved his unhappy country.

In a word, this work of Seneca's is the very reverſe of Sophocles from beginning to end. Sophocles opens his ſcene with the fineſt picture imaginable. A king at the gate of his palace, a whole people mourning and in tears, altars raiſed in every public place, and one univerſal cry of ſorrow and lamentation. Seneca preſents his king complaining to his wife in a ſtile of one of the rhetoricians of his own times. Sophocles does not make uſe of a ſingle word but what is abſolutely neceſſary, every thing in him is nervous, and contributes in ſome manner to the general movement. Seneca is every where overloaded, and weighed down by a load of ornaments; he has a great deal of all ſhew and glitter, with ſcarce any real action. The ſubject in Sophocles naturally diverſifies itſelf, Seneca talks of nothing but oracles, emblematical ſacrifices, and flitting ſhadows. Sophocles does more than he ſpeaks, and only ſpeaks for the ſake of action. Seneca acts only for the ſake of talking and haranguing. Tireſias, Creon, and Jocaſta, are with him wholly void of any proper character. Even his Oedipus does not

affect us. In reading Sophocles one experiences a pleaſing grief, a tender affliction; in reading Seneca, we are ſeized with horror at his deſcriptions; and wearied out and diſguſted with his tedious lengths.

Characters of the tragic authors of the French nation.

CORNEILLE and RACINE.

Let us now take a ſtride of fourteen centuries, and come at once to the great Corneille, a man born to create theatric poetry, had it never been created before. In him every part is united, the tender, the affecting, the terrible, the great, the ſublime. But what towers above all theſe qualifications, and indeed includes them all, is the dignity and boldneſs ſo conſpicuous in his writings. Corneille is perhaps the greateſt genius that has appeared ſince the times of Greece. Genius alone produced all with him, genius created the matter and the expreſſion. He has every where a force, majeſty, and magnificence, in which no one ever equalled him. What a glory for our language (the French) which is ſaid to be ſo much weaker than either the Greek or Latin, to have been able to furniſh ſtrokes, capable of expreſſing the fire and ideas of ſuch a divine writer.

When

When this great man began to grow old, Mr. Racine, a perſon of a native happy genius, and exquiſite taſte, improved by the reading the excellent models of the Greeks, undertook to manage tragedy in his way. Corneille rolled in a ſphere far above what moſt writers could ever think of attaining. But ſtill that poet had his faults: he often affected obſolete terms, his dialogue was often confuſed, and ſeveral paſſages had too much the air of declamation. Racine had the lucky talent to avoid falling into theſe little errors: always regular, always exact: to his natural fine genius he joined the greateſt art, and would indeed frequently make uſe of the one to ſupply the place of the other. Leſs ſtudious of elevating the ſoul than of moving it, he by that means appeared ſo much the more amiable, uſeful and familiar, to his audience, above whoſe reach he ſeldom attempted to ſoar. Corneille is, as ſome author expreſſes it, an eagle who wings his flight above the clouds, gazes on the meridian ſun, and ſeems to place his greateſt pleaſure in the midſt of ſtorms and thunders: Racine is a dove, that gently murmurs in groves of myrtle, and the midſt of roſes. Every reader is fond of Racine; but every one has it not given to him to admire Corneille to the degree he merits.

"Corneille, ſays M. de la Bruyere, is not to "be equalled in thoſe places where he excels; "he

" he then aſſumes a character wholly original " and inimitable; but this is not the ſame every " where alike: in ſome of his beſt pieces we " meet with inexcuſable faults in the manners, " and a dry declamatory ſtile, that ſtops the " progreſs of the action, and throws a deadneſs " over the whole, with a careleſſneſs in the ver- " ſification and expreſſion that appears almoſt " inconceivable in ſo great a man. His moſt " ſhining degree of merit conſiſts in his extraor- " dinary genius for the ſublime.

" Racine is always the ſame throughout, " whether reſpecting the plan or the conduct of " his pieces, which are always juſt, regular, " founded on good ſenſe and nature, or the ver- " ſification, which is correct, rich in the rhymes, " elegant, harmonious. If, however, we " may be permitted to draw a compariſon be- " tween them, by diſtinguiſhing each by that " talent which is peculiar to him, and which " appears in the ſtrongeſt light in his works, we " might ſay ſomething of this kind: Corneille " enſlaves us to his characters and ideas. Racine " adapts himſelf to ours. The former paints " mankind ſuch as they ought to be; the latter " ſuch as they really are. In the firſt we meet " with more of what we admire, and even " ought to imitate; in the other of what we ſee " in others, and experience in ourſelves. The " former tranſports, ſurprizes, commands, and " inſtructs;

" inſtructs; the latter pleaſes, moves, affects,
" and penetrates. This handles the moſt ex-
" alted and ſublime ſubjects of reaſon; that
" whatever is moſt tender and paſſionate. In
" the one we meet with rules, precepts and max-
" ims; in the other with taſte and ſentiment.
" The mind is more filled in Corneille's
" pieces; and more ſhaken and melted in thoſe
" of Racine. Corneille is the moſt moral
" writer; Racine the moſt natural one. In a
" word, the one ſeems to have imitated Sopho-
" cles, and the other to owe moſt to Euripi-
" des."

The talents of theſe two great men united give us an idea of tragedy in its higheſt perfection, and furniſhes us with the fixed rule and ſtandard of merit for every tragedy, which is to be eſteemed more or leſs perfect, according as it approaches more or leſs to the idea we have of thoſe authors and their works.

Our intention at firſt was to have given a review of the Horace of Corneille, and the whole Athaliah of Mr. Racine. But finding that ſuch a minute detail would carry us too great a length, we have confined ourſelves to a demonſtration of the diſpoſition and expoſition of Corneille's piece alone, reſerving the liberty of adding now and then a few paſſages by way of ſpecimen of his manner.

In Sophocles we have ſeen nature rich, but genuine and ſimple. In Corneille we ſhall behold her noble, great, and heroic.

Every one knows the ſtory of the three Horatii, who were champions for Rome againſt the three Curiatii, that engaged for Alba. Two of the Horatii were ſlain, and the third, though left alone, found means to overcome the three Curiatii. Nothing can be more ſimple than this ſubject as it thus ſtands. The poet has made the following variations in it. On finding that the mere hiſtorical fact had nothing in it that could intereſt any but a Roman, or one who had an intereſt in the glory of that nation, or, at moſt, could ſtrike the mind only by the ſingularity of the event, he bethought himſelf of making the ties of blood and humanity concerned, by his method of handling the ſtory, and this by making the Horatii and Curiatii allied to each other, by the marriage of one of the former with Sabina, ſiſter to the latter; and this alliance likely to be ſtill more fortified by the intended nuptials of one of the Curiatii with Camilla, ſiſter to the Horatii.

By this diſpoſition the poet has found means not only to deſcribe a very ſtriking and ſingular combat, but alſo to repreſent the love of one's country triumphing over the ties of blood, the tender paſſion of a deſpairing lover ſuperior to

the

the love of an afflicted wife. By this invention of the poet, we find the plain hiſtorical fact in an inſtant highly embelliſhed and decorated.

Let us now examine the expoſition of the ſubject: this one is one of the greateſt beauties we have belonging to the French ſtage. Here follows a ſhort analyſis of the firſt act.

The firſt ſcene is a lively picture of the alarms Sabina lies under, who is a native of Alba. She is introduced complaining to her attendant, who is a Roman maid, of her cruel ſituation.

Approuvez ma foibleſſe & ſouffrez ma donleur;
Elle n'eſt que trop juſte en un ſi grand malheur.
Si près de voir ſur ſoi fondre de tels orages,
L'ebranlement ſied bien aux plus fermes courages.

Blame not my weakneſs! and permit a grief
Too juſtly due, alas, to my misfortunes!
Since 'tis allow'd the moſt heroic ſouls
To ſhrink at ſuch impending ſtorms as theſe.

This is the intereſting part of the ſubject, which is explained, but confuſedly as yet, and that for two reaſons. Firſt, it not being neceſſary that Sabina ſhould explain to Julia a thing ſhe already knew; the wants of the poet would have appeared too plain had any more been ſaid. Secondly, by this means the curioſity of the ſpectator is more raiſed; he is now impatient to know what theſe ſtorms are with which Sabina ſeems threatened.

Ma conſtance du moins regne encor ſur mes yeux.
Quand on arrête là les déplaiſirs d'une ame;
Si l'on fait moins qu'un homme, on fait plus qu'une femme.

Commander à ſes pleurs en cette extrêmité,
C'eſt montrer pour le ſexe aſſez de fermeté.

Theſe lines exhibit the ſentiments of Sabina, which are very noble and affecting. But Julia, who is a Roman, gives her an example of a courage ſtill more exalted, and begins to gratify in part the curioſity of the ſpectator.

Les deux camps ſont-rangés aux pieds de nos murailles,
Mais Rome ignore encore comme on perd des batailles.
Loin de trembler pour elle, il lui faut applaudir;
Puiſqu'elle va combattre, elle va s'aggrandir.
Banniſſez, banniſſez une frayeur ſi vaine,
Et concevez des vœux dignes d'une Romaine.

This is the true heroic way of thinking of the Romans. This is the confidence that makes heroes. Sabina goes on to make a farther diſcovery of her ſentiments, and at the ſame time more and more explains the ſubject.

Je ſuis Romaine, helas! puiſq' Horace eſt Romain.
J'en ai reçu le titre en recevant ſa main.
Mais ce nœud me tiendroit en eſclave enchainée;
S'il m'empêchoit de voir en quel lieu je ſuis née.
Albe, où j'ai commencé de reſpirer le jour,

Albe, mon cher pays & mon premier amour!
Lotſqu'entre nous & toi je vois la guerre ouverte,
Je crains notre victoire autant que notre perte.
Rome, ſi tu te plains que c'eſt là te trahir,
Fais-toi des ennemis que je puiſſe haïr.
Quand je vois de tes murs leur armée & la nôtre,
Mes trois freres dans l'une, & mon mari dans l'autre,
Puis je former des vœux, & ſans impiété
Importuner le ciel pour ta félicité?

Now appear the reaſons Sabina had for the alarms we ſaw her under. We are now acquainted with moſt of the characters in the piece; but are as yet ignorant that the battle is to be fought that day.

To let the audience into this, Julia tells Sabina, that hitherto ſhe had appeared to have more courage; Sabina replies, that while ſlight ſkirmiſhes only were on foot, ſhe had indeed affected the behaviour and courage of a Roman.

Mais aujourd'hui qu'il faut que l'une ou l'autre tombe,
Qu'Albe devienne eſclave, ou que Rome ſuccombe,
Et qu'après la bataille il ne demeure plus,
Ni d'obſtacle aux vanqueurs, ni d'eſpoir aux vaincus,
J'aurois pour mon pays une cruelle haine,
Si je pouvois encore être toute Romaine.

Here

Here is the action quite laid open: we know what it concerns, and diſcover the end the author propoſes to himſelf. The next ſtep is to prepare the means for the execution.

As Camilla is to make the principal figure in the pathetic, it was neceſſary to make her known. Julia propoſes her to Sabina as an example of conſtancy and fortitude.

Eh, qu'à nos yeux Camille agit bien autrement!
Son frere eſt votre époux, le vôtre eſt ſon amant.
Mais elle voit d'un œil bien différent du vôtre,
Son ſang dans une armée & ſon amant dans l'autre—
Hier quand elle ſut qu'on avoit pris journée,
Et qu'enfin la bataille alloit être donnée,
Une ſoudaine joie éclatant ſur ſon front———

Sabina accounts for this joy that appeared in Camilla, by ſuppoſing, that her heart was changed with reſpect to Curiatius, whom ſhe had formerly loved, but now left for another. Camilla enters; ſhe preſently undeceives the audience on this head, and makes them anxious for her by the diſtreſsful ſituation ſhe appears to be in. She is divided between her lover and her country: ſhe muſt loſe one of them: ſhe is adviſed to give up her lover: to which ſhe replies with all the generoſity of a Roman,

Donnez-moi des conſeils qui ſoient plus légitimes,
Et pleurez mes malheurs, ſans m'ordonner des crimes.

Quoiqu'à peine à mes maux je puiſſe réſiſter,
J'aime mieux les ſouffrir que de les mériter.

Then ſhe diſcovers to Julia every thing that regards her, and the juſt-grounded hopes ſhe had of being married to Curiatius. She relates the words of an oracle, which ſeemed clearly to denote that pleaſing event; but which in effect meant her death.

La nuit a diſſipé des erreurs ſi charmantes.
Mille ſonges affreux, mille images ſanglantes,
Ou plutôt mille amas de carnage & d'horreur,
M'ont arraché ma joie, & rendu ma terreur.
J'ai vu du ſang, des morts, & n'ai rien vu de ſuite,
Un ſpectre en paroiſſant prenoit ſoudaine la fuite,
Ils s'effaçoient l'un l'autre, & chaque illuſion
Redoubloit mon effroi par ſa confuſion.

This dream includes the unravelling in embryo, which, to be natural, ſhould be in a manner contained in the very principle of the action, and be juſt hinted at from the beginning; that the ſpectator, when he comes to the cataſtrophe, may meet with a greater degree of probability in it, which is always a great help to increaſe the tragic ſentiment.

The fourth ſcene begins with an agreeable ſurprize. Hitherto the ſpectator has been entertained with nothing but tears, ſighs, and complaints. Camilla, in the exceſs of her grief, directing

recting her ſpeech to her abſent lover, whom ſhe believes in the enemy's camp, finiſhes with ſaying,

Soit que Rome ſuccombe ou qu'Albe ait le deſſous,
Cher amant, n'attens plus d'être un jour mon époux.
Jamais, jamais ce nom ne ſera pour un homme
Qui ſoit ou le vainqueur, ou l'eſclave de Rome.

At that inſtant Curiatius enters, and repeating her laſt words, cries out,

N'en doutez point, Camille, & revoyez un homme
Qui n'eſt ni le vainqueur, ou l'eſclave de Rome.

Camilla ſtarts and trembles, and with her the ſpectator. Curiatius begins to relate his ſtory: Camilla, in the height of her impatience, interrupts him ſeveral times, ſuppoſes every thing the reverſe of what it is, and by her impatience greatly encreaſes that of the audience. At length Curiatius ſatisfies the curioſity of his miſtreſs, and informs her that a peace is concluded. She, on her ſide, is in great ſurprize at the news, and abandons herſelf to an exceſs of joy, as thinking the words of the oracle now accompliſhed. Curiatius then relates how the thing happened, concluding with telling her, that three combatants are to be choſen on either ſide to determine the quarrel of the two nations. Camilla cries out,

O Dieux! que ce diſcours rend mon ame contente!

This is the compleat expoſition of the ſubject. We have the characters ſettled, we ſee the different intereſts which actuate them, and the two contending nations. With what art is this brought about! here is no confident, no forced narration to prepare the way: but it is all done in the working up of the action. We already know Sabina, Camilla, Julia, Curiatius, Horace the father, and there only remains to know the young Horatius, which will be brought about at the opening of the ſecond act. The unconſtrained continuity of ſcene, and the artful change of conditions, are well worth obſervation. The parties at firſt appeared ſunk in ſorrow, they are now elated with joy: the peace is concluded, every thing is quiet; but there is one circumſtance yet which will perplex the action again, and ſet the former ſentiments once more at work.

But we ſhall no longer purſue the order of things through the reſt of the piece; nor yet cite any of the paſſages to ſhew its beauties; they are naturally ſo lively and ſtriking, that it requires no attention to enter into them.

But how is it to be lamented that ſo beautiful a poem cannot ſupport itſelf to the end! In the three firſt acts we ſee Horatius the repreſentative of his country; in the fourth and fifth he dwindles into a private perſon, whoſe charge and defence are all the buſineſs; going on

fabula

fabula non conſtat ſibi, nec ſervatur ad imum qualis ab incepto proceſſerat. And this is the great defect of the peice. There are particular beauties without number; but the principal ones, which conſiſt in a juſt proportion of the parts, and their unity with the whole, are entirely wanting. Therefore there is little notice taken of any but the three firſt acts of Corneille's Horace; the fourth indeed is ſometimes mentioned, but the fifth never, being a mere peice of reading; which could never have ſupported itſelf but when the piece was quite new.

From this one may judge what art and genius are requiſite in the compoſition of a good tragedy. Here we ſee a ſubject, in itſelf, at once noble and affecting, in the hands of one of the greateſt maſters in his art, one poſſeſſed of the nobleſt powers; and yet we ſee him flag in the midſt of his career, after having given proofs of the moſt prodigious execution. Not the beauty of his verſe, the glow of his painting, the elegance of his narration, nor the ſublimity of his proofs, are ſufficient, with all their pomp, to cover the manifeſt defect and poverty in the matter; there wants foundation, without which nothing can ſtand.

For thoſe who would thoroughly underſtand Corneille and Racine, the beſt method is, in my opinion, to compare them with each other, in a piece which is nearly the ſame in point of

ſubject; and this is an exerciſe which we propoſe to the young readers, who are more immediately the object of our labors and attention.

And to put them in the way, and as a kind of aſſiſtance to them in their progreſs, we ſhall ſet before them the principal points of compariſon.

A parallel of the Heraclius of Corneille, with the Athaliah of Mr. Racine.

In examining any theatrical piece, we ſhould firſt begin with inveſtigating the ſubject. The ſubject in the piece of Corneille is Heraclius placed on the imperial throne, in the room of Phocas, who had uſurped it. That of Racine is Joas placed on the throne of Juda, in the room of Athaliah, who was likewiſe an uſurper.

The action comes next to be conſidered. The action already contains the ſubject in itſelf as its end, but at the ſame time adds the means and circumſtances. The action in Corneille's tragedy, is the diſcovery, acknowledgment, and crowning of Heraclius, which is brought about and executed by Leontina and Exuperus, who are the cauſe of Phocas's death. The action in Racine is the diſcovery and crowning of Joas, brought about and executed by Joad, who cauſes Athaliah to be put to death: the baſis of both pieces is the ſame.

Let us now take a ſurvey of this action in its component parts, called acts; in which we will begin

begin with Athaliah, that we may aſcend gradually from the ſimple to the complex.

Act I. Joad, in a converſation with Abner, one of the moſt powerful nobles of the kingdom, learns that Athaliah has an intention to deſtroy him, and at the ſame time finds this lord warmly diſpoſed to ſerve him on the occaſion. Upon which he reſolves to place the crown on the head of the young king, who had been preſerved and privately brought up by his wife Joſabet.

This is the expoſition of the ſubject. The buſineſs is not yet entered upon; it is only reſolved. So that here the firſt act is over before the action begins.

Act II. A fearful dream troubles Athaliah: ſhe imagined ſhe ſaw a child plunging a poniard into her breaſt; her inquietude leads her to the temple, where ſhe ſees the very child which had appeared to her in her dream; ſhe queſtions him, and wants to engage him to come to court, which he refuſes.

Here the action is ſet on foot: this child is the young king; the queen has ſeen him; but will the barely ſeeing him be ſufficient for her?

Act III. The queen orders the child to be given up to her. The high prieſt refuſes to comply with the demand, and puts every thing in readineſs for a defence.

Act IV. Joas is conſecrated, and acknowledged by the Levites in the inner temple.

Act V. The queen ſends to the high prieſt, with propoſals of delivering up the child, together with certain treaſures of David, ſaid to have been depoſited in the temple. The high prieſt offers to ſatisfy theſe demands of the queen, provided ſhe will come in perſon to the temple, with a few attendants only. She comes. They ſhew her Joas, whom they oblige her to acknowledge. She flies out of the temple in a violent rage: the high prieſt gives orders to put her to death.

This action is all along moſt perfectly ſimple: there are very few characters; and what buſineſs there is, is all carried on by Joad, Joas, and Athaliah.

The action is one, the whole of it paſſes in the ſpace of a day, and in the temple; ſo that the three unities are found perfectly well preſerved in it.

Tragic authors are allowed to make uſe of dreams upon occaſion, though they are ſomewhat of the wonderful; for this ſpecies of the wonderful ſo nearly reſembles nature, that it may be employed in like manner with her. Accordingly, we find a dream in this piece determine the enterpriſe. Joad had begged of heaven to cauſe a diſtraction in the queen's mind: it is done, and the hopes of being eaſed of this dreadful trouble and inquietude, forces her to the temple of the God of Iſrael. The impelling force exerts itſelf; the cauſes are in motion; and the action will arrive at its end.

Should

Should it be aſked, why Joad did not make uſe of the firſt opportunity of ſeizing Athaliah, when the time and place were ſo commodious, and that ſuch an occaſion might never again offer itſelf? It might be anſwered, that it was no premeditated ſtep in the ſide of Joad, but the pure effect of caprice in Athaliah that brought her to the temple; and that as Joad was not appriſed of her coming, he conſequently could not be in a condition to take his advantage of it; he afterwards found means himſelf to bring Athaliah back again to the temple at the fifth act, by promiſing to diſcover to her who the child is, and in what place the treaſures are concealed.

But could the poet ſuppoſe, that a perſon, ſuch as he paints Athaliah, haughty, imperious, miſtruſtful, and cruel, would ſo readily accept of this invitation? Was it not more natural to think, that ſhe would ſuſpect the high prieſt, whom ſhe looked upon as her declared enemy, and who had never before given her one inſtance of ſtooping to her power, and now deſires her to come with a few attendants only? From this objection, then, we are to ſuppoſe, that the want does not naturally ariſe from its cauſes; but it is probable, and that is enough. A greedy, diſquieted and perplexed woman, in the height of her diſquietude and perplexity, and willing to ſhun the trouble of entering into long diſcuſſions on an affair

affair that cannot but be diſagreeable to her, takes no time to reflect upon the danger ſhe expoſes herſelf to by ſo unwary a compliance, but gives herſelf blindly over to it, and her life pays the forfeit of her crimes and folly.

Let us now proceed to Corneille's peice.

Heraclius is preſerved by Leontina as Joas is by Joſabet. Like Joas too he remains unknown for ſome time: the breaſt of Phocas has its ſuſpicions and diſquietudes, the ſame as that of Athaliah. There is a ſcene of very critical queſtions and inquiries in both pieces; at length Phocas is put to death, as Athaliah has been, and Heraclius, like Joas, triumphs over his enemies.

Theſe two ſubjects, viewed in this light, at firſt appear both to require the ſame method of treatment: but the acceſſary of each makes ſuch an alteration in the fundamental part, that they ſeem wholly different from each other.

The *dramatis perſonæ* in Heraclius are, Phocas the emperor, Heraclius his ſon, Marcian ſon to Mauricius, Pulcheria ſiſter to Heraclius, Leontina, a woman who brought up Heraclius and Marcian, and Exuperus, a nobleman at the emperor's court.

It is a ſingular thing in this tragedy, that the whole action is carried on by Exuperus, though but an under-character in the piece. 'Tis he who is the occaſion of the various ſituations of the principal characters, the uneaſineſs of Phocas, the perplexity of Pulcheria, and the trouble

trouble of Leontina, Marcian, and Horatius, are all cauſed by him.

The revolution he brings about, how great and heroic ſoever it may be, yet leaves him infinitely inferior to the heroes on whoſe account he works. And theſe heroes, though they make but ſlight efforts themſelves, are nevertheleſs ſo noble, grand, and admirable, that we reſerve all our ſenſibility for them alone.

In Athaliah there are only two intereſts which claſh, that of Joas, and of the queen. Here there are as many different ones as there are perſons, and all of the greateſt importance. The life and empire of Phocas are concerned; death, or deteſted nuptials, muſt be the lot of Pulcheria; the moſt horrid torments threaten Leontina; and as for Marcian and Heraclius, one of them muſt die as the ſon of Mauritius, or reign as the ſon of Phocas. Theſe are circumſtances ſurprizingly intereſting; and what is ſtill more extraordinary, they all ariſe from the ſame ſpring, the preſervation of Heraclius. Theſe are the principal points of the action. Let us now follow the fable, or diſtribution of the action.

Phocas imparts to Criſpus the uneaſineſs he is under from a report that Heraclius yet lives. The tyrant having formerly preſerved Pulcheria the daughter of Mauritius, Criſpus counſels him to marry her to his ſon, and by that means involve his falſe pretences to the throne with the legitimate ones of Pulcheria. Phocas

propoſes

propoſes this marriage to Pulcheria, who inſtantly rejects it.

Tu me donnes, dis-tu, ton fils & ta couronne.
Mais que me donnes-tu, puiſque l'une eſt a moi,
Et l'autre en eſt indigne, étant ſorti de toi ?

Phocas preſſes her compliance, which only ſeems to raiſe her indignation the more : ſhe reminds him of Heraclius, and the opinion that prevails of his being yet alive, concluding with bidding him reſign the throne to the true prince.

Tu peux dés aujourd'hui le voir mieux occupé.
Le ciel me rend un frere à ta rage échappé.
On dit qu'Heraclius eſt tout prêt de paroître :
Tiran, deſcens du trône, & fais place à ton maître.

To enable us better to follow the thread of the action, we are to know, that the poet ſuppoſes the late emperor Mauritius to have entruſted Heraclius, when an infant, to the care of Leontina. Phocas having uſurped the throne, and being deſirous of extirpating all the race of Mauritius, had ſent orders to Leontina to deliver up the infant that had been conſigned to her care. Leontina, by a ſurprizing effort of heroiſm, delivers her own ſon, inſtead of Mauritius's. Phocas looking upon this compliance in Leontina as a proof of her affection for his cauſe, gave her his own ſon Marcian, who had juſt loſt the empreſs his mother, to bring up in the room of Peraclius.

Leon-

Leontina now makes a ſecond exchange, and puts Marcian in the place of Heraclius, and Heraclius in the place of Marcian, by changing their names; by which artifice ſhe not only ſecured the proſcribed prince; but Heraclius was brought up at the court of Phocas as his own ſon: and Marcian, who went under the name of Leontinus, the child whom Leontina had given up to death to preſerve Heraclius, looked upon himſelf as the real ſon of Leontina. This latter, for certain reaſons, diſcovered to Heraclius the true ſtory of his birth; but ſuffered Marcian to remain in profound ignorance of his. Here is a number of intrigues to unravel. What a ſituation, what a change muſt the ſouls of all theſe perſons experience when the myſtery comes to be cleared up! But to return.

A propoſal is made to Heraclius to eſpouſe Pulcheria; he evades it, as knowing her to be his ſiſter. Pulcheria, on her ſide, had rather ſuffer death, as believing Heraclius, who goes by the name of Marcian to be the tyrant's ſon.

Marcian, under the name of Leontius, and on the belief that he is the ſon of Leontina, adviſes the young prince, whoſe companion he is, to wed Pulcheria; to which Heraclius replies, by telling him, that he himſelf ſhould rather eſpouſe her. He then comforts the princeſs, and without making himſelf known, promiſes her all his aſſiſtance againſt the enterprizes of his ſuppoſed father.

father. This makes the whole firſt act. The ſpectator has a diſtant but dark glimpſe of futurity, and the opening is truly tragical; here is a proſpect of great dangers, revolutions, and diſcoveries. One finds one's ſelf intereſted by the haughtineſs and perplexity of Phocas, the nobleneſs and danger of Pulcheria, and the critical ſituation of the two princes.

Heraclius, not being able to prevail with Phocas to ſuſpend his nuptials with Pulcheria, reſolves to diſcover himſelf, leſt that princeſs ſhould ſuffer from the rage of the diſappointed tyrant. Exuperus appears with Leontina, tells her that ſhe has the ſon of the late emperor, that he knows it, and then ſhews her a letter from Mauritius, which atteſts the exchange. Leontina, in order to preſerve the life of the true Heraclius, who is in the tyrant's court, makes Marcian, who is in her own houſe, believe himſelf to be Heraclius. Upon this, he preſently entertains ſentiments of hatred and revenge againſt Phocas, whom he regards as the murderer of his father. Thus Marcian appears inveſted with the name and rights of the true Heraclius, which produces ſingular effects between the two princes. This is the ſecond act.

Marcian, who looks upon himſelf as Heraclius, finds out Pulcheria, and behaves to her as to a ſiſter. From her lover that he was, he now

reduces

reduces his paſſion to a fraternal tenderneſs; and they mutually encourage each other to revenge. He reſolves to kill Phocas. The emperor enters with Exuperus: Marcian declares himſelf, and braves his father.

Je me tiens plus heureux de périr en Monarque,
Que de vivre en éclat ſans en porter la marque.
Et puiſque pour jouir d'un ſi glorieux ſort,
Je n'ai que le moment qu'on deſtine à ma mort,
Je la rendrai ſi belle & ſi digne d'envie,
Que ce moment vaudra la plus illuſtre vie.
M'y faiſant donc conduire, aſſure ton pouvoir,
Et delivre mes yeux de l'horreur de te voir.

Pulcheria is now perſuaded that Marcian is really her brother by theſe ſentiments of pride and dignity. The emperor reſolves to put his ſon to death. Exuperus adviſes to do it in the moſt public manner, that the people may have no pretence to raiſe up a future Heraclius. He has his reaſons for this. We now come to the fourth act.

Marcian is already condemned to death under the name of Heraclius. This prince is of a noble and generous diſpoſition, and had formerly preſerved the life of Heraclius in a battle. This latter, ſeeing the danger that threatens his friend and deliverer, cannot ſuffer him to periſh in his room, and under his name, and himſelf live and reign under the name of Marcian. He then declares

declares himſelf to Phocas, in the preſence of Marcian. But this latter contends no leſs than himſelf to be the true Heraclius. Phocas, aſtoniſhed at the ardor with which both contend for being the ſon of Maurice and not of Phocas, breaks out into tranſports of grief and anger. Phocas queſtions Leontina on the matter, who braves him, as being ſenſible that ſhe alone is miſtreſs of the ſecret; and that the tyrant, not knowing his true ſon, dares not puniſh either, and cannot put her to death, without burying the ſecret with her.

What is Phocas to do in this ſtate of uncertainty? He reſolves they ſhall both die, unleſs one of them ſpeaks and declares himſelf. They both ſpeak together, and each declares he is not his ſon. Heraclius proves it by the conſtant refuſal to wed Pulcheria, as knowing her to be his ſiſter. Marcian proves it by Exuperus's note. At length the people mutiny, to defend the blood of Mauritius. Exuperus ſeizes the ringleaders, and carries them to the emperor, who is alone in the palace, while the reſt of his guards are poſted in different parts of the town, to keep all quiet during the execution of the pretended diſcovered prince. Theſe chiefs are in fact conſpirators, whom Exuperus has thus introduced into the palace to kill Phocas; they ſtab him, and he falls dead in the midſt of them. Exuperus then flies to inform the princes that Phocas

Phocas is dead; Leontina diſcovers the true Heraclius, and Marcian bewails his ſtate and fallen hopes. He is adviſed to reſume the name of Leontius, which he bore as the ſuppoſed ſon of Leontina, and Pulcheria is promiſed him in marriage as his reward.

Corneille's was the only genius capable of weaving an action in ſo cloſe and complicated a manner. Exuperus forcibly brings on the event, in which Leontina aſſiſts him at the ſame time that ſhe is uſing all the means in her power to oppoſe him.

Phocas, perplexed in his own mind, braved by Pulcheria, believing himſelf ſerved by Exuperus, thinks he has his enemy in his hands, finds him eſcape his reſentment, though he ſtill has him in his power; his pride and fierceneſs waſte themſelves upon Leontina; and at laſt he falls by the hand of Exuperus.

Pulcheria, enraged at the propoſal of a match ſo unworthy of her, juſt as ſhe imagines to have found a long-loſt brother, ſees that brother condemned to die. A ſecond prince appears, who likewiſe aſſerts himſelf to be her brother. She muſt marry one of the two; but yet ſhe cannot, not knowing which is her real brother, and beſides that, can never reſolve to wed the ſon of him who has murdered her father, and uſurps his throne.

Marcian

Marcian believes himſelf the ſon of Leontina; he afterwards learns that he is the ſon of the late emperor Mauritius: what a revolution does this cauſe in his heart and ſentiments! Phocas is told who he is, upon which he is condemned to die: a perſon appears who diſputes his name and title; at laſt he diſcovers that he is ſon to the tyrant, who is juſt killed.

Leontina finds one part of her ſecret divulged; it is diſcovered that ſhe has concealed the emperor's enemy in her houſe: ſhe owns it at once, and thereby hazards her own life, and the name and fortune of the true Heraclius. The latter, notwithſtanding all ſhe can ſay, goes and declares himſelf to the tyrant: he is queſtioned, and it is reſolved he ſhall die. She now ſuſpects Exuperus to have betrayed her; but it appears at laſt, that this very Exuperus is the perſon who occaſions the completion of all ſhe wiſhed for.

Here we have the intereſts and ſituations of five different perſons, turned, blended, and interwoven one with another, ſo as to form one complete piece. The texture of which is ſo cloſe, artful, bold, and natural, that perhaps no performance ever did more honor to a human genius. The parts muſt have been firſt cut out and arranged, then they muſt have been joined together, and made to ariſe from one another. And what is ſtill more admirable, the whole is

full

full, rich, and magnificent, without either parade or affectation.

Racine's Athaliah is not near ſo full of buſineſs. The action is ſingle, and goes on without circuit or interruption. There is the claſhing of two paſſions only, and that in two different perſons. The mind there is not in the leaſt put to it in the employment of the means. No troubleſome application puzzles the heart; one gives one's ſelf up to a gentle, pleaſing, and uniform emotion; and the few forcible ſtrokes that now and then intervene, rouſe the ſoul without unhinging her.

But how did Corneille's genius contrive to draw up ſo ſingular and complicated a fable? By dividing his action into as many parts as it would admit of, to produce the different ſituations.

Act I. The report goes that Heraclius yet lives; what is Phocas to do in this caſe?

Act II. Exuperus tells Leontina that ſhe has Heraclius in her houſe. What are Marcian and Leontina to do in conſequence of this?

Act III. The emperor comes to the knowledge of it, and condemns the ſuppoſed Heraclius to die. What anxiety muſt this occaſion in the adverſe party?

Act IV. The true Heraclius diſcovers himſelf to Phocas. What a perplexity does this throw the

the latter into, who does not know which to credit?

Act V. Exuperus enters immediately after having killed the tyrant, at the inſtant that Heraclius is going to be executed. What a revolution does this occaſion in the minds and fortunes of the parties concerned?

The action thus analyzed, goes on naturally and in one train, and if we examine what effect each of theſe incidental parts would naturally produce in the perſons concerned, we ſhall find that they muſt have ſpoken and acted as Corneille has made them do: for he is no leſs wonderful in his elocution, than in the invention and diſpoſition of his matter.

We ſhall not pretend to draw up an elogium of Racine or Corneille in this place. Authors of their rank can receive nothing from ſuch humble ſuffrages as ours. We obſerve them, but do not take upon us to praiſe. On looking over the whole of Racine's piece, we ſhall find that it contains very little matter; but what there is, is employed, drawn out, and diſtributed with the niceſt art. This was particularly the gift of the antients. Corneille has a prodigious genius; every thing in him is rich and abundant; incident crouds on incident: in ſhort, ſo many things occur together, that it ſeems almoſt impoſſible to employ them all. In Racine, the fund is ſo ſmall, and laid out with ſo nice a juſtneſs,

neſs, that we are afraid ſometimes that he has not a ſufficiency. The one ſpends with profuſion, the other gives with œconomy. The firſt has enough to ſpare; the ſecond has need of all he can procure. This owes his principal merit to his knowledge, taſte, propriety, and elegance; that could ſupport himſelf by his own force and weight. Any other author than Racine would have been puzzled to have made three acts of the ſtory of Athaliah. Any other than Corneille would have made ſeven or eight of Heraclius. In fine, Racine's art conſiſts in the juſt and well-regulated manner of employing his funds, which is perhaps much better than the prodigality of one who poſſeſſes more abundance. But on the other hand, when with the riches of Corneille one may be profuſe without danger of impoveriſhing one's ſelf, prodigality then becomes magnificence.

Engliſh tragic writers.

SHAKESPARE.

IT is not very eaſy to determine which ſpecies of dramatic writing *Shakeſpeare* was moſt excellent in, and conſequently the fixing his rank as a tragic or comic writer, muſt be attended with ſome ſort of difficulty: we have, however, ventured to aſſign him a place amongſt the former,

mer, and, as ſuch, to introduce him in company with the two great authors, whoſe characters have been already given.

If we undertook to examine his tragedies by thoſe rules which are eſtabliſhed by Ariſtotle, and taken from the model of the *Grecian* ſtage, it would be no very hard taſk to find faults in the greateſt part of them. But it would be hard to judge him by a law he did not acknowledge; he is to be conſidered as a man that lived in a ſtate of almoſt univerſal licence and ignorance: there was no eſtabliſhed judge, but every one took the liberty to write according to the dictates of his own fancy. And, indeed, all things conſidered, it cannot but be a matter of great wonder that he ſhould advance dramatic poetry ſo far as he did. He is doubtleſs very deficient in many of the conſtituent parts, as they are called, of a tragic or heroic poem, ſuch as the fable, with the diſpoſition, order, and conduct of its ſeveral parts. His tales were ſeldom invented, his unities ſeldom juſt, But in recompence for his careleſsneſs in this point, when he comes to another part of the *drama*, *the manners of his characters in acting, or ſpeaking what is proper for them, and fit to be ſhewn by the poet*, he may be generally juſtified, and in very many places greatly admired.

From among the innumerable inſtances of this to be met with in Shakeſpeare, we ſhall ſelect ſuch

ſuch only as are offered us in his two celebrated tragedies of Hamlet and King Lear. His Hamlet is founded on much the ſame ſtory with the *Electra* of *Sophocles*. In each of them a young prince is engaged to revenge the death of his father; their mothers are equally guilty, are both concerned in the murder of their huſbands; and are afterwards married to the murderers. There is in the firſt part of the *Greek* tragedy, ſomething very moving in the grief of *Electra*; but, as Mr. D'Acier has obſerved, there is ſomething very unnatural and ſhocking in the conduct he has given that princeſs and *Oreſtes* in the latter part. Oreſtes embrues his hands in the blood of his own mother; and that barbarous action is performed, though not immediately upon the ſtage, yet ſo near, that the audience hear *Clytemneſtra* crying out to *Ægyſthus* for help, and to her ſon for mercy; while *Electra*, her daughter and a princeſs, (both of them characters that ought to have appeared with more decency) ſtands upon the ſtage, and encourages her brother in the parricide. What horror does this not raiſe! Clytemneſtra was a wicked woman, and had deſerved to die; nay, in the truth of the ſtory, ſhe was killed by her own ſon; but to repreſent an action of this kind upon the ſtage, is certainly an offence againſt thoſe rules of manners proper to the perſons which ought to be obſerved there. On the contrary

let us only look a little on the conduct given by Shakeſpeare. Hamlet is repreſented with the ſame piety towards his father, and reſolution to revenge his death, as Oreſtes; he has the ſame abhorrence of his mother's guilt, which, to provoke him the more, is heightened by inceſt: but 'tis with wonderful art and juſtneſs of judgment that the poet reſtrains him from doing violence to his mother. To prevent any thing of that kind he makes his father's ghoſt forbid that part of his vengeance:

But howſoever thou purſueſt this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy ſoul contrive
Againſt thy mother aught; leave her to heaven
And to thoſe thorns that in her boſom lodge
To prick and ſting her.

This is to diſtinguiſh rightly between *horror* and *terror*. The latter is a proper paſſion for tragedy, as has been already ſhewn; but the former ought always to be carefully avoided.

The appearance of the ghoſt is a maſter-piece in its kind, and wrought up with all the circumſtances that can create either attention or terror. The mind of the reader is wonderfully prepared for his reception by the diſcourſes that precede it. His dumb behaviour, at his firſt entrance, ſtrikes the imagination very ſtrongly; but every time he enters he is ſtill more terrifying. Who

can

can read the ſpeech with which young Hamlet accoſts him without trembling?

HOR. Lo! my lord, it comes.

HAM. Angels and miniſters of grace defend us!
Be thou a ſpirit of health, or goblin damn'd,
Bring'ſt with thee airs from heaven, or blaſts from hell;
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'ſt in ſuch a queſtionable ſhape,
That I will ſpeak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father: royal Dane, oh! anſwer me. *&c.*

I muſt here beg leave to take notice of a remark made by Mr. Smith, the late tranſlator of Longinus upon that, ſection the 22d, where his author is ſpeaking of the *Hyperbaton*, "that nothing can better illuſtrate his remarks than the celebrated ſoliloquy of Hamlet on his mother's marriage, where the poet's art has hit off the ſtrongeſt and moſt exact reſemblance of nature. The behaviour of his mother makes ſuch impreſſion on the young prince, that his mind is big with abhorrence of it, but expreſſions fail him; he begins abruptly, but as reflections croud thick upon his mind, he runs off into commendations of his father. Some time after, his thoughts turn again on that action of his mother, which had raiſed his reſentments, but he only touches it, and flies off again; in ſhort, he takes up eighteen lines in telling us, that his

mother married again in leſs than two months after his father's death.

Mr. Dryden obſerves on the famous

——— Varium et imutabile ſemper
Fœmina

of Virgil, that it is the ſharpeſt ſatire in the feweſt words that ever was made on womankind; for both the adjectives are neuter and *animal* muſt be underſtood to make them grammar. Mr. Theobald is of opinion, I think not unjuſtly that the expreſſion of Hamlet in the above ſoliloquy,

Frailty thy name is woman,

is, as being equally conciſe in the terms, and more ſprightly in the thought and image, to be preferred to Virgil, and the ſharper ſatire of the two.

We have been the ſhorter in our remarks on this play being willing to haſten to the examination of his *Lear*, as a piece in which he has more particularly diſplayed that great art of making the paſſions of each perſonage in his drama operate according to his peculiar habit and frame, and this tragedy is indeed looked upon by many excellent judges as his maſter-piece, on account of the many ſtrokes of this nature, with which it abounds.

The

The tragedy of Lear is built on a plan the very reverſe of Hamlet; for as in that the author intended to exhibit filial piety in its utmoſt poſſible degree; in this he paints, in the moſt ſtriking colors, the horrid crime of filial ingratitude. To enforce this, he repreſents an old monarch, tired with the cares of ſtate, and willing to diſtribute his poſſeſſions among his daughters, in proportion to their affections towards his perſon. Accordingly the two that flatter him obtain all, the third ſiſter being diſinherited for her ſincerity, and the king is at length driven by the ingratitude of his two eldeſt daughters, to an extreme of madneſs, which produces the fineſt tragic diſtreſs ever ſeen on any ſtage.

The nature of his fable, and the moral uſe of his work (which is to expoſe filial ingratitude) being thus ſketched out, we ſhall proceed to obſerve how he lays on his coloring, the diſpoſition of the perſonages, the expreſſion of the paſſions, and which is the capital figure in the piece.

An examen of the tragedy of Lear.

It is ſurprizing that any critic ſhould impute the madneſs of Lear to the loſs of royalty. The behaviour of his children is always uppermoſt in his thoughts, and we perceive it working upon his paſſions, till at length his mind

ſettles into a fixed attention to that ſingle object. Indeed, the folly of a parent's diveſting himſelf of his royalty, and putting himſelf in the power of his children, muſt incidentally appear in a play founded on ſuch a ſtory as that of Lear; but had thoſe children not proved ungrateful, I apprehend, there is no reaſon to imagine the king's mind would have taken the fatal turn it did. But we ſhall, in the courſe of this examination find, that Lear's deportment and ſentiments fully evince the truth of what we have here offered.

In his firſt ſcene he ſhews himſelf ſuſceptible of the moſt violent emotions. The poet has drawn him impetuous to the greateſt degree, proud, haughty, revengeful, and tender-hearted. In ſuch a mind it is not to be wondered that ill treatment ſhould excite the moſt uneaſy ſenſation. He takes fire at the imaginary appearance of diſaffection in Cordelia.

> But goes thy heart with this?
> So young and ſo untender!

He is ſoon after alarmed with ſuſpicions of diſreſpect from Goneril, "I will look further into't." He then is convinced of her contemptuous diſregard, and the effect it has upon him indicates a mind impotent and liable to the worſt perturbations.

Does

Does Lear walk thus? ſpeak thus? where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his diſcernings
Are lethargiz'd—.

His reflexions after this ſhew what is neareſt his heart.

Ingratitude! thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous, when thou ſhew'ſt thee in a child,
Than the ſea-monſter—.

He obſerves that Cordelia's fault was ſmall; and when even that made ſuch an impreſſion on him, what are we to expect from his fiery diſpoſition, when rejected by thoſe to whom he had given all? His imprecation, though big with horror, is the natural reſult of his indignation; and the tenderneſs and overflowings of ſoftneſs which melt him in the midſt of his vehemence, produce a fine conflict of paſſions.

Th'untainted woundings of a father's curſe
Pierce ev'ry ſenſe about thee!——Old fond eyes
Beweep this cauſe again, I'll pluck ye out,
And caſt ye with the waters that ye loſe
To temper clay.

His haughtineſs then breaks out in a menace to his daughter,

Thou ſhalt find
That I'll reſume the ſhape which thou do'ſt think
I have caſt off for ever.

His addreſs to Regan, with the reflection on her ſiſter Gonerill's ingratitude and wickedneſs is extremely tender and pathetic.

——— Oh! Regan, ſhe has tied
Sharp tooth'd UNKINDNESS, like a VULTURE here
——— I ſcarce can ſpeak to thee—thou'lt not believe
With how deprav'd a quality——Oh! Regan—
Thy tender hearted nature ſhall not give
Thee o'er to harſhneſs ———

He that can read theſe lines without being ſoftened into tears, muſt, as Mr. Addiſon has ſaid on another occaſion, have either a very good or a very bad head. What a picture of the mind have we here? The ſtrugglings with his ſorrows, the breaks of paſſion, the attempt to ſpeak, and the inſtant ſuppreſſion of his powers, laſtly, his catching hold on the ſuppoſed dutifulneſs and love of his daughter Regan, as an anchor to ride by in this tempeſt of his fortunes, are all of them the moſt natural and affecting touches. Can the human imagination, in all her treaſury of language, find words to expreſs at once the deteſtable crime of diſobedience to our parents, and

and the exquiſite feelings of an injured father, like the following paſſage:

—— She has ſtruck me with her tongue
Moſt ſerpent-like upon the very heart.

Who is there that does not inſtantaneouſly find himſelf in a guſh of tears on reading theſe lines? and, more particularly when, a little afterwards, he comes to the ſpeech, which cloſes with,

——— You think I'll weep,——
No, I'll not weep—tho' I have full cauſe for weeping——
—— This heart ſhall break into a thouſand flaws'
Or e'er I'll weep———O fool, I ſhall go mad.

The laſt touch in this ſpeech is the fineſt cloſe of a climax of paſſion that can be conceived; and even then the old monarch feels that his wits begin to turn; for which melancholy ſituation Shakeſpeare all along finely prepares us, by ſkilfully marking each ſtep the mind takes, in all its workings, towards that ſettled ſtate of grief.

Here the diſtreſſed king leaves his daughter's roof, and the next time we ſee him, he is on a wild heath, in a violent ſtorm, where all his reflections take a tincture from the gloomy colour of a mind diſeaſed with anguiſh, and we ſoon ſee what is the principal object of his attention.

——— Thou all ſhaking thunder
Crack nature's mould; all germens ſpell at once
That make UNGRATEFUL MAN.

And again;

——— The tempeſt in my mind
Doth from my ſenſes take all feeling elſe
Save what beats there———Filial ingratitude!

As yet the perturbation of his mind does not ſeem fixed to a point, he begins to moralize, but ſtill with a view to his own afflictions, until Edgar enters, diſguiſed like a madman. Lear's firſt queſtion is, "have his daughters brought "him to this paſs? Could'ſt thou ſave nothing? "did'ſt thou give them all?"—And this I take to be the firſt touch of fixed madneſs in the play, and plainly points out the cauſe of his diſtraction.

As an hero is now out of his ſenſes, a new field opens itſelf to the poet. He had before diſplayed every movement of the heart, and the human underſtanding now becomes his province, in which, we ſhall find, he acquits himſelf with the moſt maſterly ſkill. Mr. Locke obſerves, that madmen do not ſeem to have loſt the faculty of reaſoning; but having joined together ſome ideas very wrongly, they miſtake them for truths; and they err as men do that argue right from wrong principles: for by the violence of their imagi-

nations,

nations, having miſtaken their fancies for realities, they make right deductions from them.

Agreeably to this account, Lear, upon the appearance of a madman, takes it for granted, that it is owing to his daughter's ill treatment, and, when contradicted, he replies, "Death! "Traytor! nothing could have ſubdued nature "to ſuch a lowneſs but his unkind daughters." --He next takes him for a philoſopher, and agreeable to that notion, enquires what is the cauſe of thunder.

After this, how was Shakeſpeare to repreſent Lear again, ſo as to keep up the paſſions and heighten the diſtreſs? By taking advantage of every circumſtance in Lear's temper. He had ſaid that he would re-aſſume the ſhape he had caſt off: this then remained untouched; and accordingly, in the next ſcene, we perceive him actually putting it in execution, and his fancy ſuggeſts to him, that he is a king; from which he reaſons, as from every other principle, and always with an eye to his children. "No, they cannot touch me "for coining, I am the king himſelf. There's my "gauntlet, I'll prove it on a giant!" From this his imagination wanders, and, after a little rambling, he ſoon returns, and the habitual ideas again take poſſeſſion of him. "Ha! Regan! "Gonerill! they flatter'd me like a dog, &c." After this, Glo'ſter enquiring if it is not the king, he catches at the word, and anſwers, "Aye! "every

" every inch a king." And then he draws ſome more inferences from that notion, till he reflects, that Glo'ſter's baſtard ſon was kinder to his father than his own daughters, got in lawful ſheets. From this he digreſſes into an invective againſt women, and continues raving, till at length his ſpirit of revenge returns upon him: " And when I've ſtolen upon theſe SONS-IN-" LAW, then kill, kill, kill, kill."

It was Shakeſpeare's art to reſerve his being crowned with ſtraw for the laſt ſcene of his madneſs, as it is a repreſentation of human nature reduced to the loweſt ebb.

Every topic of parental diſtreſs being now exhauſted, and all the king's maſter-paſſions diſplayed in his madneſs, the poet judiciouſly ſhews him gradually coming to himſelf in the next ſcene, and we ſee the ideas dawning ſlowly on his ſoul.

Where have I been?—where am I?—fair day-light!

In this recollection of his reaſon, he never once mentions the loſs of royalty; but again touches upon the cauſe of his diſtreſs, in his ſpeech to Cordelia.

I know you do not love me; for your ſiſters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong;
You have ſome cauſe; they have not. ——

Thus,

Thus, before his madneſs, in it, and after it, Lear never loſes ſight of the ideas which had worn ſuch traces on his brain; and ſhall we pretend to look for any other cauſe of diſtreſs, in ſcenes, which are drawn ſo forcibly and ſtrong, and kept up with the moſt exquiſite ſkill to the very dying words of the unhappy monarch?

Though our great poet pays us very amply for all his tranſgreſſions againſt the laws of Ariſtotle; yet it were to be wiſhed that the noble wildneſs of his genius had not rendered him ſo unbounded in his fables. Had this tragedy been planned with more art, without an underplot to draw off our affections from the principal object, it had been a piece for all the united efforts of Greece to envy. However, the epiſode, in which the baſtard is acting the ſame unnatural part as Lear's legitimate daughters, is not entirely detached from the main ſubject; the miſfortunes of the good old Glo'ſter, who endeavours to aſſiſt the forlorn king, muſt touch every breaſt, and the character of Edgar muſt appear amiable in every eye.

The cloſe of this tragedy is full of terror and compaſſion; and our great poet has here given us a death which is not often to be found in the play-houſe bill of mortality, viz. the death of Lear, without the dagger or the bowl. But, perhaps, after all the heart piercing ſenſations which we have before endured through the whole

whole piece, it would be too much to ſee this actually performed on the ſtage; and it is beyond doubt that the play, as it is altered, will always be the moſt agreeable to an audience, as the circumſtances of Lear's reſtoration, and the virtuous Edgar's alliance with the amiable Cordelia, muſt always call forth thoſe guſhing tears, which are ſwelled and ennobled by a virtuous joy. *

LEE.

THIS eminent dramatic poet was the ſon of a clergyman of the church of England, and was educated at Weſtminſter ſchool under Dr. Buſby. After he left this ſchool, he was ſome time at Trinity College, Cambridge; whence, returning to London, he went upon the ſtage as an actor.

He died before he was 34 years of age, and wrote eleven tragedies, all of which contain the divine enthuſiaſm of a poet, a noble fire and elevation, and the tender breathings of love, beyond many of his cotemporaries. He ſeems to have been born to write for the ladies; none

* The alteration is juſtified by another reaſon, which is, that Lear was really reſtored to his crown, if we may believe Spenſer, who gives the narrative in his tenth canto of the Fairy Queen.

ever

ever felt the paſſion of love more intimately none, ever knew to deſcribe it more gracefully, and no poet ever moved the breaſts of his audience with ſtronger palpitations than Lee. The excellent Mr. Addiſon, whoſe opinion in a matter of this ſort is of the greateſt weight, ſpeaking of the genius of Lee, thus proceeds *. "Among our modern Engliſh poets, there is "none who was better turned for tragedy than "our author; if, inſtead of favoring the impe- "tuoſity of his genius, he had reſtrained it, and "kept it within proper bounds. His thoughts "are wonderfully ſuited for tragedy: but fre- "quently loſt in ſuch a cloud of words, that it "is hard to ſee the beauty of them. There is "an infinite fire in his works, but ſo involved "in ſmoke, that it does not appear in half its "luſtre †.

* Spectator. No. 39, vol. 1ſt.

† Among the many inſtances of this kind to be met with in his pieces; the following does, I think, indiſputably claim the precedence.

Away, begone! and give a whirlwind room!
Or I will blow you up like duſt! Avaunt,
Madneſs but meanly repreſents my toil.
Eternal diſcord,
Fury, revenge, diſdain, and indignation,
Tear my ſwoll'n breaſt, make way for fire and tempeſt!
My brain is burſt, debate and reaſon quench'd.
The ſtorm is up, and my hot bleeding heart
Splits with the rack; while paſſions, like the winds,
Riſe up to heaven, and put out all the ſtars.

"He

" He frequently ſucceeds in the paſſionate " parts of the tragedy, but more particu- " larly where he ſlackens his efforts, and eaſes " the ſtyle of thoſe epithets and metaphors, in " which he ſo much abounds.

In his tragedy of the Rival Queens, our author has ſhewn what he could do on the ſubject of love; he has there almoſt exhauſted the paſſion; painted it in its various forms, and delineated the workings of the human ſoul, when influenced by it.

He makes Statira thus ſpeak of Alexander:

Not the ſpring's mouth, nor breath of jeſſamine,
Nor vi'lets infant ſweets, nor op'ning buds,
Are half ſo ſweet as Alexander's breaſt!
From every pore of him a perfume falls:
He kiſſes ſofter than a ſouthern wind,
Curls like a vine, and touches like a god!
Then he will talk, good gods! how he will talk!
Even when the joy he ſigh'd for is poſſeſs'd,
He ſpeaks the kindeſt words, and looks ſuch things,
Vows with ſuch paſſion, ſwears with ſo much grace,
That 'tis a kind of heaven to be deluded by him.
If I but mention him the tears will fall;
Sure there is not a letter in his name
But is a charm to melt a woman's eyes.

The noble critic abovementioned has the following remark on this ſpeech.

" What can be more natural, more ſoft, or " more paſſionate than that ſpeech of Statira's,

" where

" where ſhe deſcribes the charms of Alexander's
" converſation? That unexpected break in the
" line

" Then he would talk, good gods! how he would
" talk.

" and turning the deſcription of his manner of
" talking into an admiration of it, is inex-
" preſſibly beautiful, and wonderfully ſuited to
" the fond character of the perſon that ſpeaks
" it. There is a ſimplicity in the words that
" outſhines the utmoſt pride of expreſſion."

Lee was certainly a man of great genius; when it is conſidered how young he died, he performed miracles; and had he lived till his fervor cooled, and his judgment ſtrengthened, which might have been the conſequence of years, he would have made a greater figure in poetry than ſome of his cotemporaries, who are now placed in a ſuperior rank,

We beg leave to introdue to our reader's acquaintance, a tragedy, which, perhaps. he has not for ſome time heard of, written by this great man, viz. Lucius Junius Brutus, the Father of his country,

We mention this tragedy becauſe it is certainly the fineſt of Lee's, and perhaps, one of the moſt moving plays in our language. Junius Brutus engages in the juſt defence of the injured rights of his country, againſt Tarquin the Proud; he ſucceeds in driving him out of Rome.

His

His ſon Titus falls in love, and interchanges vows, with the tyrant's daughter; his father commands him not to touch her, nor to correſpond with her: he faithfully promiſes; but his reſolutions are baffled by the inſinuating and irreſiſtable charms of Teraminta; he is won by her beauties; he joins in the attempt to reſtore Tarquin; the enterprize miſcarries, and his own father ſits in judgment upon him, and condemns him to ſuffer.

The interview between the father and ſon is inexpreſſibly moving, and is only exceeded by that between the ſon and his Teraminta. Titus is a young hero, ſtruggling between love and duty. Teraminta an amiable Roman lady, fond of her huſband, and dutiful to her father.

There are throughout this play, we dare be bold to affirm, as affecting ſcenes as ever melted the hearts of an audience.

OTWAY.

OTWAY.

THIS author has closely followed nature in the language of his tragedy, and therefore shines in the passionate parts more than any of our English poets. As there is something familiar and domestic in the fable of his tragedy, more than in those of any other poet, he has little pomp, but great energy in his expressions. For which reason, though he has admirably succeeded in the tender and melting parts of his tragedies, he sometimes falls into too great a familiarity of phrase in those parts, which by Aristotle's rule, ought to have been raised and supported by the dignity of expression.

Mr. Charles Gildon, in his laws of poetry, stiles Otway a poet of the first magnitude, and tells us, with great justice, that he was perfect master of the tragic passions, and draws them every where with a delicate and natural simplicity, and therefore never fails to raise strong emotions in the soul. There is not, perhaps, a stronger instance of this force, than in the play of the Orphan; the tragedy is composed of persons whose fortunes do not exceed the quality of such as we ordinarily call people of condition, and without the advantage of having the scene heightened by the importance of the characters; his inimitable skill in representing the workings

of

of the heart, and its affections, is ſuch, that the circumſtances are great, from the art of the poet, rather than from the figure of the perſons repreſented. The whole drama is admirably wrought, and the mixture of paſſions raiſed from affinity, love, gratitude, and miſunderſtanding between brethren, ill uſage from perſons obliged, ſlowly returned by the benefactors, keeps the mind in a continual anxiety and contrition. The ſentiments of the unhappy Monimia are delicate and natural; ſhe is miſerable without guilt, but incapable of living with a conſciouſneſs of having committed an ill act, though her inclination had no part. Mrs. Barry, the celebrated actreſs, uſed to ſay, that in her part of Monimia, ſhe never ſpoke theſe words, "*Ah "poor Caſtalio!*" without tears; upon which occaſion, Mr. Gildon obſerves, that all the whole pathetic force had been loſt, if any more words had been added, and the poet would have endeavoured in vain to have heightened them, by the addition of figures of ſpeech, ſince the beauty of thoſe three plain-ſimple words, is ſo great by the force of nature, that they muſt have been weakened and obſcured by the fineſt flowers of rhetoric.

The tragedy of the Orphan is not without great blemiſhes, which the writer of a criticiſm on it publiſhed in the Gentleman's Magazine, has very judiciouſly and candidly ſhewn.

Venice

Venice Preſerved is ſtill a greater proof of his influence over our paſſions; and the faculty of mingling good and bad characters, and involving their fortunes, ſeems to be the diſtinguiſhed excellence of this writer. He very well knew that nothing but diſtreſſed virtue can ſharply touch us with pity; and, therefore, in this play, that we may have a greater regard for the conſpirators, he make Pierre (the chief of them) talk of redreſſing wrongs, and repeat all the commonplace of malecontents.

Jaffiere's wants and diſtreſſes make him prone enough to any deſperate reſolution; yet, ſays he, in the language of genuine tenderneſs,

——— When I think what Belvidera feels,
The bitterneſs her tender ſpirit taſtes of,
I own myſelf a coward: bear my weakneſs,
If throwing thus my arms about thy neck,
I play the boy, and blubber in thy boſom.

How dreadful is his ſoliloquy, after he is engaged in the conſpiracy.

I'm here; and thus the ſhades of night furround me;
I look as if all hell were in my heart,
And I in hell. Nay, ſurely 'tis ſo with me;
For every ſtep I tread, methinks ſome fiend
Knocks at my breaſt, and bids it not be quiet.

I've

I've heard how desp'rate wretches, like myself,
Have wandered out at this dead time of night,
To meet the foe of mankind in his walk;
Sure I'm so curst, that tho' of heaven forsaken,
No minister of darkness cares to tempt me.
Hell, hell! why sleep'st thou?

This is the most awful picture of a man plunged in despair that ever poet drew. There is no reading it without terror, and when uttered from those heart-affecting actors Garrick and Barry, the flesh creeps, and the blood is chilled with horror.

In this play Otway catches our hearts by introducing the episode of Belvidera, whose character and distress are so drawn as to melt every heart. There cannot be a more moving, simple, and unaffected strain of grief than what we meet with in most of her speeches. No wild burst of passion, no outrageous sallies of despair, disturb the melancholy silence of her sorrows; majestically miserable in every expression, how meltingly does she sympathize with the pangs of her ruined husband in the following lines:

Oh I will love thee! ev'n in madness love thee!
Tho' my distracted senses should forsake me,
I'd find some intervals when my poor heart
Should swage itself, and be let loose to thine.
Tho' the bare earth be all our resting place,
Its roots our food, some clift our habitation,
I'll make this arm a pillow for thy head

As

As thou ſighing lieſt, and ſwell'd with ſorrow
Creep to thy boſom, pour the balm of love
Into thy ſoul, and kiſs thee to thy reſt;
Then praiſe our God, and watch thee till the morning.

It has been obſerved, and with juſtice, by that great critic Mr. Addiſon, that Otway has founded this tragedy on ſo wrong a plot, that the greateſt characters in it are thoſe of rebels and traitors. Had the hero of his piece diſcovered the ſame good qualities in the defence of his country, that he ſhewed for its ruin and ſubverſion, the audience could not enough pity and admire him. But, as he is now repreſented, we can only ſay of him what the Roman hiſtorian ſays of Cataline, that his fall had been glorious, *ſi pro patriâ ſic concidiſſet*, had he ſo fallen in the ſervice of his country.

After ſuffering many eclipſes of fortune, and being expoſed to the moſt cruel neceſſities, this excellent poet died of want in a public-houſe on Tower-hill, in the 33d year of his age, 1685. Who can read this without indignation at thoſe idols of greatneſs, who can receive, nay often demand, worſhip from men of genius, and yet can ſuffer them to live miſerable and die neglected!

ARTICLE

ARTICLE III.

Of comedy.

CHAP. I.

What comedy is.

TRAGEDY is an imitation of the beautiful and the grand; comedy of the *ridiculous*. One elevates the ſoul, and forms the heart; the other poliſhes the manners, and corrects the external deportment. Tragedy humanizes us by compaſſion, and reſtrains us by fear φόβος ἢ ἔλεος. Comedy takes off half the maſk, and artfully preſents the mirror in our face: tragedy does not make us laugh, becauſe the faults of the great are a kind of public misfortunes.

Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.

Comedy makes us laugh, becauſe the faults of the vulgar are trifling; we are under no apperhenſion for their conſequences.

The epic has been already defined, the recital of a wonderful action, and tragedy the repreſentation of an heroic action, capable of exciting terror and pity.

To purſue the ſame ſyſtem, we ſhall ſay, that comedy is the repreſentation of an action in inferior life, calculated to make the ſpectator laugh.

The

The epic excites admiration, which is underſtood by the term *marvellous* or *wonderful*. Tragedy raiſes terror and pity, as is ſignified by its name, *tragedy*: laſtly, comedy makes us laugh, and this property renders it comic or comedy.

Were we to content ourſelves with defining comedy ſimply the imitation of an action in low or common life, without adding *to make us laugh*, all the vices, all the virtues, and all the incidents of common life, would claim a place therein. The misfortunes of a father, or the diſappointments of a young fellow in his wiſhes and expectations, would be the ſubject. In ſhort, comedy would make us weep as well as tragedy. But the nature of this ſpecies of poetry being fixed and limited to the end it propoſes to accompliſh, whatever does not make us laugh, or at leaſt tend to that, does not properly belong to comedy. The *ridiculous* is its eſſential object.

The ridiculous, according to Ariſtotle, conſiſts in thoſe faults, which ſhow a deformity, without cauſing grief; and threatens no one with fatal conſequences, not even the perſon in whom the defect is found; for did it threaten miſchief, it could no longer be a ſubject for laughter to the generous heart, which, on a ſecret inward reflection, would find more charms in compaſſion.

The matter of comedy, then, is a deformity of the manners, ſhewn in its ridiculous light. The philoſopher deſcants gravely againſt vice; the ſatyriſt reprehends it ſharply; the orator combats it with force and fire; the comedian attacks it with raillery, and often ſucceeds better in this way than he could have done by the ſtrongeſt and beſt urged arguments.

Ridiculum acri
Fortiùs ac meliùs magnas plerumque ſecat res.

Every deformity carries in it an oppoſition to ſome law, or eſtabliſhed rule of form and example.

The kind of deformity then which conſtitutes the ridiculous, is, when a man's thoughts, ſentiments, manners, and actions are contradictory to nature, and to the received laws and cuſtoms the place he lives in, or to what might be expected from one in his ſituation.

For inſtance, when a perſon from among the dregs of the people is for ever talking of kings and emperors; one at Paris dreſſes himſelf like a Chineſe; another in his grand climacteric amuſes himſelf very ſeriouſly with cutting out figures in paper, or riding upon a hobby-horſe; another, ruined and overwhelmed with debt, takes it in his head to give others leſſons on œconomy, and the method of growing rich. Now theſe ridiculous deformities are evidently ſo many

ny contradictions to the notions we have of order, and of the fixt rules of decency and decorum.

But it is to be remarked that every kind of ridicule is not riſible. There is one ſort of it that is nauſeous and tireſome, that is, groſs ridicule; and another that raiſes our indignation, by hurting our ſelf-love, in painting a fault which is too often the conſequence of it, and that is, fooliſh pride. But the true comic ridicule of the ſtage is always pleaſing and delicate, without ever alarming us, or giving us any ſecret uneaſineſs.

We are now to conſider in what this agreeable riſible conſiſts. This is, properly ſpeaking, the only queſtion now left to conſider; for what relates to the actionand characters has been already diſcuſſed in the preceding articles.

There are ſome painters who have the art to draw an exact reſemblance of the moſt ſerious countenances, and yet at the ſame time throw a ſtrong air of ridicule into them. Doubtleſs theſe artiſts know in what manner to heighten or lower the degrees, and how to vary the inflexions which render them parodic, without breaking in upon the principal lineaments, or making any alteration in the characteriſtic combination; theſe men poſſeſs what may, I think, be called, the *comic taſte* in painting.

That of poetry, to judge by the compariſon, ſhould conſiſt in painting in a lively manner, and with a ſtrong likeneſs, the humors and manners of the people, heightened with a certain groteſque or air of pleaſantry, which is eaſier to conceive than define.

Let us try however to get ſome idea of it from the examples afforded us by authors in this way.

When Soſia, in Amphitryon, repeats before his lanthorn the compliment he intends to make his miſtreſs Alcmena; he ſuppoſesthat lanthorn to be his lady, and, with a moſt profound bow, calls it *madam*, addreſſing his diſcourſe to it as a real perſon: this is true comedy. It is low comedy, I allow: but a valet and his ideas are the ſubject. However, we are not talking of low comedy or high comedy, but of the comic only. What now does this ſcene preſent us with? true and well painted manners. It is very natural for a valet, whoſe head is full of a meſſage he is charged to deliver punctually, to con over the ſpeech he is to make within himſelf, to conſider in what manner he is to addreſs himſelf, nay, and even to rehearſe it before hand, if alone and unobſerved. Now Soſia is in juſt ſuch a ſituation; he is alone, in the dark, he has his lanthorn in one hand, which, leſt it ſhould be troubleſome to him, he ſets down on the ground before him, then ſuppoſes it to be Alcmena, and ſpeaks to it as if it was really her:

her: can any thing be more agreeable to nature? Here we have none of the buffoonry of a merry andrew, the grimaces of a ſcaramouch, or the ſilly tricks of a harlequin; no ridiculous dreſs, no far-fetched geſtures, to provoke a laugh: every thing is true, ſimple, and without contorſion: but the thought is droll, and the execution yet more ſo. We behold a man who is doing a thing which is very innocent in itſelf, and which, nevertheleſs, he would be heartily aſhamed and confounded at, did he think himſelf obſerved by any one.

There is the ſame pleaſantry in the ſurprize of *Monſieur Jourdain*, in the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, when he looks at himſelf in the glaſs, as he pronounces a, e, i, o, u, and thinks himſelf quite another kind of perſon than formerly, when he is told that he has been making proſe for forty years and upwards, without knowing any thing of the matter.

Of the ſame nature is the blunder between Harpagon and Cleanthes in the Miſer, where there is a great deal of the comic, in one ſpeaking of his caſket, and the other of his miſtreſs: *The bright eyes of my caſket!* ſays Harpagon; and the repetition of *What a plague had he to do in that galley!* is no leſs ſo. The old curmudgeon has nothing but that to ſay; he muſt redeem his ſon, and redeem him by parting with his money too. He walks up and down, fuming and ſtamping

ing, and repeating every moment, in a doleful tone, *What a plague had he to do in that galley!*

In fine, one may judge of the comic, of the things, and the ſtyle, by that of the dreſs and geſtures; one is in every dramatic piece the image of the other. The Marquis de Gaſcogne, and the Miſanthrope, Sir Fopling Flutter and the Old Batchelor, are dreſſed from head to foot in a manner ſuited to their characters, but which carries with it at the ſame time an affectation of ridicule and ſingularity. The tone of voice is likewiſe taken from nature and reality. But all this is at the ſame time ſtretched or caricatured, a little, as we ſay, in terms of art. Moſt of the geſtures are particularly pointed and expreſſive, which ſhews affectation; and to all this we may add the ſtage-tricks, which are ſo many mute ſcenes, containing an infinite deal of the riſible.

What has been ſaid is ſelf applicable to the characters, ſituations, and ſtyle of comedy. It is comic when it is agreeable to truth, but that truth a little ſtrained and touched beyond the ordinary limits.

For example: an old man repreſented as bewailing the loſs of his ſon, or a ſon complaining of having too ſevere and rigid a father, cannot properly be called comic. It is a true picture of the paſſions indeed, and, perhaps, painted in a natural and lively manner; but, for

all

all that, it will not make us laugh. But ſhew the archneſs of a valet, who puts a trick upon his maſter, and gains his end by ſome well-laid ſcheme; this is cunning dexterity, and we find ourſelves pleaſed with it.

Again, the critical ſituation of one, who, deceived by a name, finds he has diſcovered his ſecret to the very perſon in the world from whom it ought to have been hid with the greateſt care, affords the ſingular and ſtriking. But a character who is continually finding fault, and ſnarling for ſnarling's ſake; or one that deſcends to the loweſt degree of meanneſs, to ſatisfy his covetous and avaricious temper, has ſomething in it ſo ſhocking and diſagreeable, that it would rather make us dull than diſpoſe us to be merry.

In fine, tho' a piece may be full of arch alluſions, *double entendres*, ſmart raillery, *bons mots*, and witty repartees, muſt we for that immediately cry out, this is comedy? No. Theſe ſtrokes are only the ornaments that ſerve to ſet off the the entertainment; but can in no ways conſtitute the form and character of this or any other particular kind of poetic production.

The true comic, then, what with the Latins was called *vis comica*, is, as we have already ſaid, truth of ridicule, more or leſs exceeding the common limits, as the comic of the piece happens to be more or leſs delicate. There is in

comedy a certain nice point on this ſide, of which people, who think juſtly, cannot laugh at all, and beyond which they will laugh no longer. The more delicate the taſte, and the more converſant it is in excellent models, the reader will more eaſily perceive the diſtinction here ſpoken of; but it is one of thoſe niceties in taſte which can only be perceived.

Now, truth appears puſhed beyond its limits, 1ſt. When the ſtrokes are multiplied and preſented all together. There are ridiculous circumſtances in common life; which do not appear ſtriking, becauſe they are not frequent. A miſer, for example, may give a few proofs of his covetous diſpoſition in one or two circumſtances of his life and behaviour; but then the ſtrokes which make theſe proofs are intermixed and confounded with a variety of others of a different character, by which they loſe the greateſt part of their force. But the miſer of the ſtage does not utter a word, nor has a ſingle geſture but what is expreſſive of avarice, which makes the exhibition extraordinary, tho' true; and all together forms a ridiculous, at which we cannot forbear laughing.

2d. Truth is carried beyond its limits, when it exceeds common probability. * A miſer ſees two candles burning at a time, he runs to blow

* L'Avare of Moliere, act 5.

one

one of them out: this is juſt, it is agreeable to his character, and the notions we have of a covetous perſon; ſomebody lights it again, and he again blows it out. This is carrying the thing very far; but it nevertheleſs cannot be ſaid to exceed the limits of comedy. For there is this difference between tragedy and comedy, that, in the former, every thing ſhould play with ſuch an appearance of truth, that we may take the image for reality, or we ſhall not be moved. But, in comedy, tho' we may ſuſpect it to deviate from truth here and there, this does not in the leaſt prejudice us againſt it, but rather makes the action more pleaſant. The genius of comedy being natural, gay, and declaring itſelf ſo, takes no pains to conceal its deſign of making us laugh. Horace gives this reaſon for it; we weep when we ſee others ſhed tears, and are diſpoſed to mirth when we ſee a ſprightly air. Don Quixote is a ridiculous character, on account of his miſtaken notions of chivalry; Sancho is no leſs ſo for his imaginary greatneſs: but the author ſeems to ridicule both of them, and to make them do and ſay the oddeſt and moſt extravagant things, on purpoſe to divert himſelf at their expence.

There is not perhaps any thing more ſtrictly comic than the end of the fight between the canons in Boileau,* where he deſcribes a

* Lutrin.

warrior dreſſed in ermine, his two fingers ſolemnly pointed out, and putting all his enemies to flight with his benedictions: one endeavours to avoid the ſtroke, but the prelate making a dexterous ſtep, turns ſuddenly round upon his adverſary, whom he ſeizes, and immediately throws to the ground with a benediction. The author is very ſenſible that in this he tranſgreſſes all truth; but he makes the extravagance of his fancy amuſing.

The third manner of raiſing the comic is, by contraſting the decent to the ridiculous. In the ſame ſcene we ſee a man of ſenſe and an impertinent gameſter, who plagues him with a thouſand out of the way queſtions. Here the one character ſets off and heightens the other. The prudent woman and the houſewife appears to advantage with the learned lady; the humane and accompliſhed gentleman with the moroſe and ſurly man-hater; and a young ſpendthrift with his covetous hunks of a father. Tragedy is the encounter of the paſſions: here it is the encounter of contrary incidents with each other, or with ſound reaſon and decorum.

For theſe two kinds of contraſt are met with in the comic, and virtue is in the middle of the two extremes. Theſe two extremes may claſh with virtue, as moroſeneſs with affability, an inſtance of which we have in the Miſanthrope; or with each other, as in the characters of

Micio and Demea in Terence's Adelphi, where the one makes allowance for every thing, the other allows of no indulgence at all.

So that there is a diſtinction of two different kinds of actors and characters in comedy, the one true, the other comic. The firſt of theſe ought to be repreſented, as in tragedy, with truth, juſtneſs, ſtrength, and a ſuitable decorum; the other with more ſtrength than truth, and more exggeration than juſtneſs. The comedian ſhould here ſhew himſelf a little, and give tokens of being an imitator, becauſe whatever is an imitation of the ridiculous is in itſelf riſible; not only as having the ridiculous for its object, but as being an imitation: a copy, or imitation, implying ſomewhat pleaſing and agreeable. But it is the reverſe with tragedy, which, conſidered as an image, is no ways moving. If imitation appears here, it effectually dries our tears, and rids us of our griefs.

This obſervation is of great importance, as it includes almoſt the whole difference between the tragic and the comic; ſince it follows from thence that the action, characters, and ſpeeches in comedy may appear both as image and reality. As real, they are to be natural. As being an image of art, there is ſome evident degree of art to be added, by way of ſhowing that it is propoſed to laugh at the expence of the perſon or character imitated. Whereas, in tragedy, a

diſcovery

diſcovery of the intention of drawing tears from the ſpectator would at once break the charm of the illuſion, and guard the heart againſt any future attack.

The ridiculous is found every where: not one of our words, actions, thoughts, geſtures, or motions, but is ſome way or other ſuſceptible of it. They may be ſtrictly preſerved, and yet turned into grimace, by the ſlighteſt addition. From hence we may readily conclude, that whoſoever is born to be a true comic poet, poſſeſſes an inexhauſtible fund of matter; every character that he meets with in ſociety furniſhing him with ſomewhat or another proper for his purpoſe.

Comedy has ſeveral degrees which conſtitute its different kinds. There is the nice delicate comedy, which only pleaſes the underſtanding; ſuch is the Miſanthrope, the Femme Scavante, and the Tartuffe of Moliere, where every thing is decent and regular; the manners are painted in ſo true a manner, and with ſo very light an addition, that they hardly appear to be feigned. There is another degree again which is of the farce kind, and conſiſts in the artful intrigues of a valet or a chambermaid, * or the humors of a ſharping attorney, or a faggot-binder turned doctor †. Here things are manifeſtly exage-

* Les intrigues de Scapin. † Le medecin malgré lui.

rated

rated to the higheſt pitch, and the whole is, properly ſpeaking, groteſque or buffoonery, rather than comedy, exceeding all limits of truth, and carried to a degree of grimace, diſtortion, and extravagance.

But theſe two extremes admit of ſeveral mediums eaſily to be conceived, and it is likely that, in ſuch a medium alone, is found the true comic, which at once pleaſes the underſtanding, and ſtrikes the imagination. For, in ſhort, comedy is intended to make us laugh, but if one laughs ſo very methodically, can it properly be called laughing? There is a way of reconciling all, by mixing the ſeveral kinds of comedy, for theſe can as eaſily be made to fall in with each other, as the different kinds of characters. The firſt characters ſhould always play high comedy, for people who have had the advantage of an education always ſhow it, even in their manner of playing the fool. Valets, chambermaids, and ſuch like, ſhould always play in the low comedy, as being the ſtile moſt ſuitable to them. Whoever has the art to unite theſe two points in one proper degree, is ſure to pleaſe every one; for your very delicate people are oftentimes rather aſhamed, than offended, at being made to laugh by the low tricks of an harlequin, and would, perhaps, enjoy their mirth very willingly, provided nobody ſaw them.

After

After what has been already ſaid on ſtile in general, and its ſeveral differences, it will, I fancy, be needleſs to define that of comedy in particular, which ſhould be, as near as poſſible, ſimple, clear, and familiar, without ſinking into meanneſs, ſoaring into wild flights, or creeping on in an inſipid monotony. The thoughts ſhould be ſmart and delicate, and the expreſſions rather lively than brilliant; it ſhould be void of pompous words, labored metaphors, and free from an affected train of moral ſentences; not but that comedy does ſometimes raiſe itſelf, and ſpeak in a loftier tone; but, in its greateſt liberties, it never forgets itſelf, but is always what it ſhould be. Was it to riſe to the pitch of tragedy, it would exceed its proper bounds, and conſequently be eſſentially faulty, inſtead of beautiful.

CHAP. II.

A ſhort hiſtory of comedy.

COMEDY (according to Ariſtole) did not appear till after tragedy. This latter owing its riſe to the worſhip of the gods, claimed the firſt place in the attention of the poets. But when once it was fixed upon a firm baſis, and had taken a ſettled form, the Margites, a poem of Homer's, wherein he deſcribed the character of

of an idle fellow, and one who was good for nothing at all, gave at once the idea of comedy. Nothing remained but to carry this new kind of character into action, as had been before done by the heroic. Now this was done with great eaſe in the beginning of comedy, when every thing was drawn directly after nature. If there was a raſcal, a notorious cheat, or an infamous debauchee in a place, they took that perſon's real name, air, dreſs, and actions, and thus exhibited him on the ſtage; * So that it was abſolutely a portrait, and not a fancy-piece; which certainly required much leſs genius than to draw the characters and manners in an heroic piece, where the whole of the model is, perhaps, purely ideal.

This firſt ſpecies of comedy was, that we meet with in Eupolis, Cratinus, and Ariſtophanes, and is called the *Antient Comedy*. The

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* ——————— poetæ
——————— quorum priſca comœdia virorum eſt
Si quis erat dignus deſcribi, quod malus, aut fur,
Quod mœchus ferret, aut ſicarius, aut alioqui
Famoſus; multa cum libertate notabant.
Hor. Sat. 4. l. 1.

When antient comedy amus'd the ſtage,
And poets boldly fill'd th' all-licens'd page,
None, worthy to be ſhewn, eſcap'd the ſcene,
No public knave, or thief of lofty mein.
The looſe adult'rer was drawn forth to fight,
The ſecret murth'rer, trembling, lurk'd in night;
Vice play'd itſelf, and each ambitious ſpark
Bore on his branded front the poet's mark.

laſt named author, in his comedy of *the Clouds*, brought Socrates upon the ſtage, in the manner already deſcribed.

On, vit par le public un poëte avoué,
S'enrichir aux depens du merite joué;
Et Socrate par lui dans un choeur de nuées
D'un vil amas de peuple attirer les huées.

BOILEAU.

The actor, who perſonated him, was named Socrates; his maſque was moulded after the exact likeneſs of Socrates's face; he wore a cloak of the ſame ſhape and color with that of the philoſopher's, and diſputed publicly, like him, upon the nature of *right* and *wrong*. Nor did they confine this licence to each other alone; they went even ſo far as to make free with the characters of the gods themſelves, which they frequently turned into ridicule. All this while the magiſtrates and people only laughed at their proceedings; but when, from the gods and philoſophers, they were inſolent enough to attack even the magiſtrates themſelves, theſe reverend gentlemen preſently found the raillery grow too ſharp, and beyond bounds; and began to conſider ſeriouſly about ſtanding up in defence of inſulted virtue and ridiculed religion. In conſequence of this, a law was enacted, by which it was forbidden to make uſe of the real names of

of any particular perſon: and the chorus remained ſilent, to its ſhame.

The people, whom the poets attacked without fear of offending, as no one particular will chuſe to take the ſtroke to himſelf, were very angry to ſee themſelves deprived of a ſpectacle, which, at the ſame time that it afforded them an amuſement, did likewiſe give them a kind of revenge on their rulers, by whom (as the multitude always do) they thought themſelves oppreſſed and injured. The poets then fell upon another way of ſatisfying them, and, at the ſame time of eluding the force of the law. They made uſe of fictitious names, under which, they exactly deſcribed the characters and manners of thoſe they thought proper to make the ſubjects of their ridicule; and this they did in ſo lively a manner, that it was impoſſible to be miſtaken in the perſon hinted at. The audience uſed to ſay to one another, "This is ſuch an one." The whiſper went round, and then they had the double pleaſure of the ſcandal and the application, in the room of the ſingle one which had been taken from them: this was called *the middle comedy*.

But when the legiſlature found that the grievance they intended to prevent by the firſt law, returned upon them under another form, they provided a ſecond, by which it was ſtrictly forbidden to repreſent any real or particular family

mily-occurrences; and this reduced comedy nearly to the ſtate in which we ſee it at this day. It was no longer a ſatire upon private life, but an innocent mirror, held forth to preſent us the image of life, and its different manners. This was called the *new comedy*, in which Diphilus and Menander exceeded all their brother writers.

GREEK and LATIN Comic AUTHORS.

The characters of ARISTOPHANES, PLAUTUS, and TERENCE.

ARISTOPHANES.

WHAT Cicero ſays in ſpeaking of orators, that they ſhould always adapt their eloquence to the taſte of their audience, may be with much greater reaſon applied to comedy; ſince the object of eloquence is to lead the audience, but that of comedy to follow it, and adapt itſelf to their ideas and taſte, which it ſhould always endeavour to comply with, and pleaſe. Hence comedy has, at all times, been ſo diſpoſed as to be the image of the manners of thoſe to whom it devotes its labors.

The Athenians were vain, light, and inconſtant; void of manners or reſpect towards the gods; inſolent, wicked, and ever more apt to laugh at an idle joke than profit by an uſeful leſſon. Such was the people whom Ariſtophanes had to pleaſe. There is no doubt but that he might,

might, had he thought proper, have in part effected a reformation of character amongſt them, without giving into, and flattering all their vices; but then having them all himſelf, he was at no ſort of trouble as an author, in hitting the taſte of the public, for whom he wrote. He was ſatyrical through a natural malevolence, groſs by the corruption of his manners, impious by taſte, and, with all this, poſſeſſed of a certain gaiety of imagination, which continually ſupplied him with thoſe whimſical ideas, and odd allegories, with which his pieces do in general ſo much abound, and which indeed ſeem to be the very baſis and foundation of ſeveral of them. Here then we have two cauſes for this character, ſo peculiar to the works of this author, viz. his own taſte, and that of his countrymen for whom he wrote.

But there was yet a third, and that lay in comedy itſelf, whoſe ſtate, nature, and object was not as yet thoroughly fixed. It is not with comedy as with an heroic poem, which carries its own idea clearly and plainly in itſelf, viz. the repreſentation of the excellent, of the beſt, *imitatio meliorum*, and requires nothing farther to explain it than ſome ſmall addition to the common virtues. But comedy is the imitation of the bad, the worſt, *imitatio pejorum*, which carries a very vague idea. For here men are to be repreſented either worſe than they really are,

by

by which they are to be rendered odious; more fooliſh, by which they become contemptible, or more ridiculous, to raiſe the mirth of others at their expence. Theſe three objects, of which the latter only at preſent appertains to comedy, were confounded together in the time of Ariſtophanes.

Beſides this, there was yet another diſtinction to be made, and that was between the gods, perſons of an exalted rank, and thoſe ſtill inferior; and to fix to theſe, the poet before us has indiſcriminately confounded his gods with his great men, and both one and the other with the vulgar. Nay, he has gone yet farther, and confounded the natures of theſe, and from thence formed a ſet of monſters of his own invention: he has repreſented his men like birds, waſps, frogs, and clouds, maſquing, and accoutring them as the extravagance of his imagination dictated, ſo that ſome of them would make one laugh, and ſome were fitter to frighten: and this has obliged him him to invent a new and unaccountoble kind of ſtyle for them, as extraordinary as the perſons for whom the words were made. His compoſitions were neither of the pantomime nor farce kind, but an aſſemblage of follies and extravagancies, which, nevertheleſs, from the deſign and ſenſe apparent in them, could come from no one but a perſon of admirable wit and genius.

The

The different characters weret not at that time properly eſtabliſhed or preſerved: in his piecesthe father talks like the ſon, and the ſon in the ſame ſtyle as the father; the maſter like his ſervant, the ſervant like the maſter: there is no difference between the language of gods and men, ſometimes lofty, ſometimes low, always without rule, and often fitter to raiſe a laugh from black-ſhoes and fiſh-women, than ſenators and people of condition. The whole is full of ſatire, perſonal alluſion, allegory, buffoonry, and vulgariſms.

His Plutus, which is one of his moſt ſober pieces, is ſufficient to prove the lengths this author carried licentiouſneſs of imagination, and freedom of genius. He rallies the government, laſhes the rich, derides the poor, makes a mock of the gods, and throws out a thouſand indecencies; but all this is conveyed in touches with ſuch vivacity of ſpirit, that the piece ſeems rather made for the ſake of introducing theſe, than theſe intended for the ornaments and ſetting off of the piece.

The blind deity (Plutus) is aſked the reaſon of his appearing ſo ſlovenly and dirty. "Why "(ſays he) I juſt come from Patroclus, who "has never bathed himſelf ſince he was born." This is a ſpecimen of his ſatire. "But how "comes it you are blind? Oh! that is Jupiter's "will, out of his hatred to honeſt people, be-

"cauſe

"cauſe I once happened to ſay that I intended "to fix my reſidence amongſt them: now, to "prevent this, he has taken away my ſight." This ſhews his impiety. "Yet, for all this, "it is theſe ſort of people that make him the "moſt ſacrifices." That is true. "But, "ſuppoſing you was to have your ſight reſtored, "would you really take up your dwelling with "honeſt people? To be ſure! but how long "is it ſince I have ſeen any! Faith, I believe "you; as for my part, though I have tolerable "good eyes, I cannot find them any where."

In the third act Plautus is brought to ſleep in the temple of Æſculapius, in order to recover his ſight. Cario, a ſervant, relates what has paſſed to his miſtreſs. The prieſt, having put out the lights, orders every one to obſerve a ſolemn ſleep or ſilence, in caſe they ſhould hear the hiſſing of the ſerpent-god *. Cario, pretending to be faſt aſleep, diſcovers the prieſt, who is carrying off the choiceſt gifts that have been preſented to the gods. Tempted by this example, he makes free with a meſs of broth belonging to an old woman juſt by him. The old woman puts out her hand to ſave her pan, when Cario, pretending to be the ſacred ſerpent, makes a hiſſing noiſe, and, at the ſame time, bites her hand; which the old wife,

* Æſculapius.

thereupon,

thereupon, ſnatches away haſtily, and the arch wag ſups up her broth. After having ſtuffed his guts, he has a kind of unſavory eſcape, with which the noſtrils of the young women about him are greatly offended. As for the god, he does not take much notice of it, becauſe, as a phyſician, he could not be unacquainted with perfumes of that kind. Plutus, having recovered his ſight, ſalutes the ſun and the city of Athens, and bluſhes to ſee how he has ſquander'd his gifts on the wicked and worthleſs, and reſolves to be juſter for the future in his diſtributions. An honeſt man, ſuddenly grown rich, appears before the god to return him thanks for his favors, and to conſecrate to him the enſigns of his poverty, which are, an old cloak, and a pair of worn-out ſhoes. At that inſtant appears an informer, who has been ſtripped of his ill acquired riches: the reſt of the actors inſult him, and deck him with the rags, which formerly belonged to the honeſt man.

PLAUTUS.

THE Romans made ſome eſſays towards comedy, before their acquaintance with the Greeks. They had their *hiſtriones mimi* and buffoons, that amuſed the lower claſs of the people. But this was, at beſt, a rough ſketch

of

of what came afterwards. * Livius Andronicus, a Greek by birth, firſt ſhewed them comedy, nearly ſuch as it was at Athens, having its *Dramatis Perſonæ*, action, plot, and unravelling; in a word, with all its eſſential parts. As for the expreſſion, or ſtyle, that muſt naturally partake of the roughneſs of the Roman people, who were, in thoſe days, acquainted with little more than war and arms, and whoſe only theatrical amuſements conſiſted in ribaldry, and attacking each other with perſonal abuſe. To Andronius ſucceeded †Nævius and ‡Ennius, who

* The poet Andronicus took the prænomen of Livius, becauſe he had been ſet at liberty by M. Livius Salinator, whoſe daughters he had inſtructed.

He repreſented his firſt tragedy a year before the birth of Ennius, the firſt year after the firſt Punic war, and the 514 of Rome, in the conſulſhip of C. Claudius Cento, and M. Sempronius Turditanus; about 160 years after the death of Sophocles and Euripides, 50 after that of Menander, and 220 before the birth of Virgil. Rollin's Hiſt. A. & Sc. Ant. v. 2. p. 36.

† C. N. NÆVIUS, according to Varro, had ſerved in the firſt Punic war. Encouraged by the example of Andronicus, he trod in his ſteps, and five years after him, began to give the public his comedies. He drew upon himſelf the hatred of the nobility, and eſpecially of one Metellus; which obliged him to quit Rome. He retired to Utica, where he died. He had compoſed the Hiſtory of the firſt Punic war in verſe. *Idem ibid.*

‡ Q. ENNIUS. He was born the 514 or 515 year of Rome, at Rudice, a city of Calabria, and lived to the age of forty, in Sardinia. It was there he became acquainted with Cato the cenſor, who learnt the Greek language of him at a very advanced age, and afterwards carried him to Rome, as M. Fulvius Nobilior afterwards did to Ætolia. The ſon of this Nobilior cauſed the freedom of Rome to be granted him, which,

in

who ſomewhat poliſhed the Roman ſtage, as did Pacuvius, Cecilius, § and Attius ‖. At length

in thoſe times was a very conſiderable honor. Scipio Africanus had a great friendſhip for him, on account of his having celebrated his victories in heroic verſe. It is eaſy to conceive that the Latin poetry, in its infancy, and weak, at the time we are ſpeaking of, could not have much beauty and ornament. It ſometimes ſhowed force and genius, but without elegance and grace, and with great inequality. This Quintillian, where he draws Ennius's character, expreſſes, by an admirable compariſon. *Ennium ſicut ſacros vetuſtate lucos adoramus, in quibus grandia et antiqua robora jam non tantam habent ſpeciem quantam religionem.* Cicero, in his treatiſe upon old age, relates a feat which ought to do Ennius's memory abundance of of honor; he ſays, "That poet, at the age of ſeventy, carried "the two loads, which are commonly thought the hardeſt to "bear, poverty and old age, not only with ſuch conſtancy, "but gaiety, that it might almoſt be ſaid, he took delight in "them." Id. p. 37, 38.

§ Theſe two poets lived in the time of Ennius, both, however, younger than him. The firſt, according to ſome, was a native of Milan, and at firſt lived with Ennius. Pacuvius was nephew to Ennius, and was of Brunduſium. Lælius, one of the perſons whom Cicero introduces in his dialogue upon friendſhip, in ſpeaking of Pacuvius as his particular friend, ſays, that the people received one of his plays, called *Oreſtes*, with uncommon applauſe, eſpecially the ſcene where Pylades declares himſelf to be Oreſtes to the king, in order to ſave his friend's life, and the latter affirms himſelf to be the true Oreſtes.

Tho' both theſe authors lived in the time of Lælius and Scipio, when the purity of language and manners were peculiarly great, yet their diction carries no air of ſo happy an age, Id. p. 38.

‖ *L. Attius* or *Accius*, for his name is wrote both ways, was the ſon of a freed-man. He exhibited ſome theatrical pieces in the time of Pacuvius, though almoſt fifty years younger than him.

This poet lived in great friendſhip with D. Junius Brutus, who firſt carried the Roman arms into Spain, as far as the ocean. Accius compoſed verſes in honor of him, with which that general adorned the porch of a temple, that he built with the ſpoils taken from the enemy. Id. p. 39.

Plautus and Terence appeared, and theſe carried the Latin comedy to the higheſt degree of perfection it ever attained.

PLAUTUS *(M. Accius)* was of Salinæ, a city of Umbria, in Italy (in Romagnia)*. On exhibiting his comedies at Rome, juſt after the pieces called ſatires, which were no other than drolls, filled with the groſſeſt ribaldry and obſcenity, he found himſelf obliged to ſacrifice to the reigning taſte of the times. It was his buſineſs to pleaſe, and the number of delicate connoiſſeurs were ſo few, that, had he confined himſelf to writing ſolely for them, his works would no longer have been calculated for the public. Born, like Ariſtophanes, with a freedom and gaiety of genius, he every-where abounds with wit and pleaſantry; but yet his writings ſavor ſtrongly of the ruſt of the age before him; low conceits, buffooneries, ſorry jokes, and wretched quibbles. Beſides, the writers of his time did not much conſult the ear, for his verſes are of all meaſures and kinds. Horace complains of this, and plainly tells us, that it is ridiculous to recommend Plautus for his raillery *(ſales)*, or the harmony of his verſe *(numeros)*. The whole paſſage is as follows:

* A. Gell. tells us after Varro, that Plautus applied himſelf to merchandize, and that, having loſt all he had in it, he was obliged, for a living, to ſerve a baker, in whoſe houſe he turned a corn-mill. *Aul. Gell.* v 3. c. 3

At noſtri proavi Plautinos & numeros et
Laudavere ſales; nimium patienter utrumque
Ne dicam ſtulté mirati: ſi modo ego & vos
Scimus inurbanum lepido ſeponere dicto,
Legitimumque ſonum digito callemus & aure.
Hor. de Art. Poet.

Theſe faults of Plautus, however, do not hinder him from being the chief of the Latin comic poets. He is every-where full of action, life, and fire. His genius, naturally rich and eaſy, furniſhed him with all he ſtood in need of; invention in forming his plots, and dexterity in unravelling them, delicate touches, thoughts proper to mark his characters, and an eaſe, energy, and ſoftneſs of expreſſion, to convey thoſe thoughts and ſentiments. Over and above all this, he has that certain caſt or turn which conſtitutes the real comic, and throws an air of ridicule upon every thing he takes in hand; a talent which was likewiſe poſſeſſed by his predeceſſor, Ariſtophanes, in the higheſt degree of perfection. His pieces are in general more natural than thoſe of Ariſtophanes; and, except in his Amphitryan, you always ſee mankind, and their adventures, repreſented in the moſt probable light, without any of that extravagance ſo common to the Greek poet. We may form a judgment of this, from the ſcene in his *Aulularia*, which we ſhall here ſubjoin, for the uſe of our young read-

ers, to give them ſome idea of the comedy and Latinity of this poet.

EUCLIO and STAPHYLA.

" EUC. Out a doors, I ſay: come out: I'll " fetch you out with a horſe pox, for a damn- " able, prying, ferret-eyed witch.

" STA. Why do you beat and miſuſe a " poor wretch at this rate?

" EUC. To make you a poor wretch as long " as you live; you jade.

" STA. But why, Sir, am I thruſt out of " doors now?

" EUC. Muſt I give you an account, you " provoking baggage?----Get you from the " door:---that way:---See how the jade moves. " Heark ye, do you know what's brewing for " you? If I take a good cudgel, or a horſe-whip, " 'ſbud I ſhall ſoon put you out o' your ſnail's " pace.

" STA.

Senex *Euclio*. *Staphyla* anus.

Eu. EXI, inquam, age exi, exeundum hercle tibi hinc eſt foras,
Circumſpectatrix, cum oculis emiſſitiis,
St. Nam cur me miſeram verberas? *Eu.* Ut miſera ſis,
Atque ut dignam mala malam ætatam exigas,
St. Nam me qua nunc cauſſa extrufiſti ex ædibus?
Eu. Tibi ego rationem reddam, ſtimulorum ſeges?
Illuc regredere ab oſtio, illuc ſis, vide ut
Incedit: at ſcin quo modo tibi res ſe habet?
Si hodie hercle fuſtem cepero, aut ſtimulum in manum,
Teſtudineum iſtum tibi ego grandibo gradum.

St.

" STA. *(Aſide)* Would I were hang'd out " of the way, rather than be bound to ſerve " ſuch an old rogue.

" EUC. How the gipſey mutters to herſelf--- " Faith, I ſhall ſpoil thoſe damn'd eyes of " yours, then look what I'm doing if you can " ---Huzzy, go farther off :---farther ſtill--- " farther ſtill:---ſtill, I ſay.---So! ſtand there. " ---Now, you baggage, ſtir one ſtep, move " a hair's breadth, or look back in the leaſt, till " I ſpeak, and, by the Lord, I'll hang ye up that " inſtant.---*(To himſelf going off)* I ne'er met " with a more ſubtle old hag than this in my " days: I'm curſedly afraid this witch ſhould " trap me in my diſcourſe, and diſcover the place " where I've hid my gold: troth I beleive the " cunning jade has eyes in her breech--Now for " my gold that has coſt me ſuch a woeful deal of " trouble; I'll go ſee whether that be ſafe as I " hid it. [*Exit* Euclio.]

St. Utinam me divi adaxint ad ſuſpendium
Potius quidem quàm hoc pacto apud te ſerviam.
Eu. At ut ſceleſta ſola ſecum murmurat!
Oculos hercle ego iſtos, improba, effodiam tibi,
Ne me obſervare poſſis, quid rerum geram.
Abſcedę etiam nunc, etiam nunc, etiam, ohe! nunc.
Iſtic adeſto: ſi hercle tu ex iſto loco,
Digitum tranſverſum, aut unguem latum exceſſeris,
Aut ſi reſpexis donicum ego te juſſero,
Continuò hercle ego te dedam diſcipulam cruci.
Sceleſtiorem me har[illegible]

Vidiſſe

STAPHYLA *alone.*

" As I live I can't deviſe or imagine what " evil genius or madneſs has poſſeſſed my maſter; " he uſes me ſo inhumanely, and kicks me out of " doors ten times a-day. Troth it puzzles me " ſtrangely to find out the meaning of his crazy " whims: he watches whole nights together; " and ſits all day long within doors, like a lame " cobler in his ſtall.---Well, conſidering theſe " plagues, and the difficulty of concealing my " young miſtreſs's labor, which is juſt at hand, " I think I have nothing left but to make a ſhort " cut, and hang myſelf.

Re-enter EUCLIO.

" EUCLIO. Now I've found all well within " doors, my mind's a little at eaſe---Now come " in, and take care of the houſe. [*To* Staph.

" STA. What, for fear it ſhould be ſtolen " away? There's no great booty, faith, for " thieves

---

Vidiſſe nunquam, nimiſque ego hanc metuo malè,
Ne mihi ex inſidiis verba imprudenti duit;
Neu perſentiſcat aurum ubi eſt abſconditum,
Quæ in occipitio quoque habet oculos, peſſima.
Nunc ibo ut viſam, ſit ne ita aurum ut condidi,
Quod me ſollicitat plurimis miſerum modis.
St. *ſola.* Nec nunc mecaſtor quid hero ego dicam meo,
Malæ rei eveniſſe, quamve inſaniam,
Queo comminiſci: ita miſeram me ad hunc modum
Decies die uno ſæpe exanclat ædibus.

Neſcio,

" thieves; there's nothing but emptineſs and
" cobwebs.

" Euc. Indeed! Oho! I ſuppoſe I muſt
" keep a palace like an emperor for you, you
" old ſorcereſs, muſt I! Huzzy, huzzy, I'll have
" every cobweb taken care of and preſerved.
" I'm very poor, I confeſs, but I patiently bear
" what the gods lay upon me---Get ye in, and,
" d'ye hear, make faſt the door; I'll be back
" preſently. Take eſpecial care that you do not
" let a creature come within the doors: and,
" that they may'nt pretend an excuſe to borrow
" fire, I'll have it all put out, every ſpark, d'ye
" mind that? if there be any now, out with it
" this inſtant. If any of the neighbours want
" water, tell 'em the pump is dry; if they would
" borrow a knife, an axe, a mortar, or a peſtil,
" as they are always borrowing ſomething, tell
" them the houſe has been robbed, and they are

Neſcio pol quæ illunc hominem intemperiæ tenent:
Pervigilat noctes totas: tum autem interdius
Quaſi claudus ſutor domi ſedet totos dies.
Neque jàm quo pacto colem herilis filiæ
Robrum, propinqua partitudo cui appetit.
Queo comminiſci: neque quicquam melius eſt mihi
Ut opinor, quam ex me ut unam faciam literam
Longam, meum laqueo collum quando obſtrinxero.
Eu. Nunc defæcato demum animo egredior domo,
Poſtquam perſpexi ſalva eſſe intus omnia.
Redi nunc jam intro atque intus ſerva. *Sta.* Quippini:
Ego intus ſervam? An ne quis ædeis auferat?
Nam hîc apud nos nihil eſt aliud quæſti furibus,
Ita inaniis ſunt oppletæ atque araneis.
Eu. Miram quin tua me cauſa faciat Jupiter
Philippum regem, aut Darium, trivenefica.

Ara-

" all ſtolen. 'Sblood I'll have nobody ſet a ſtep " within my houſe when I'm gone out; there- " fore, if *Good Fortune* herſelf ſhould come, I " charge ye, keep her out.

" STA. O' my conſcience you need not fear " her coming; for ſhe has never attempted it " yet, as near a neighbour as ſhe is *.

" EUC. Hold your impertinent prating " tongue, and get ye in.

" STA. To pleaſe you I'll do both.

" EUC. And be ſure you ſecure the door " with two great bolts; I'll be back again pre- " ſently. [*Exit* Staphyla.

EUC.

Araneas mihi ego illas ſervari volo.
Pauper ſum, fateor, patior: quod dî dant, fero.
Abi intrò, occlude januam, jam ego hîc ero,
Quod quiſpiam ignem quærat, extingui volo,
Ne cauſſæ quid ſit, quod te quiſquam quæriret.
Nam ſi ignis vivet, tu extinguêre extempulo.
Tum aquam aufugiſſe dicito. Si quis petet
Cultrum, ſecurim, piſtillum, mortarium,
Quæ utenda vaſa ſemper vicini rogant,
Fures veniſſe, atque abſtuliſſe dicito.
Profecto in ædeis meas me abſente neminem
Volo intromitti, atque etiam hoc prædico tibi;
Si Bona Fortuna veniat, ne intromiſeris.
St. Pol ea ipſa, credo, ne intromittatur, cavet.
Nam ad ædis noſtras nuſquam adiit, quanquam propè eſt'.
Eu. Tace, atque abi intrò. *St.* Taceo, atque abeo.
Eu. Occludeſis
Fores ambobus peſſulis, jam ego hic ero.
Diſcrucior animi, quia ab domo abeundum eſt mihi.
Nimis hercle invitus abeo, ſi, quid agam, ſcio.

* By this ſpeech of Staphyla's it is to be ſuppoſed, that there was either a temple or ſtatue of *Good Fortune* near Euclio's houſe.

Nam

EUCLIO *alone.*

"O! I'm wretchedly perplex'd that I'm "forc'd to go out of doors now, and, troth, it "goes ſore againſt my mind; however, 'tis upon "ſure grounds. For now is the time for our "officer to diſtribute the money to the poor: "now if I ſhould be negligent and not be among "the beggars, I'm afraid the world would "preſently conclude, that I had got money by "me. For 'tis n't likely ſo poor a fellow as I "appear to be, ſhould let ſlip any opportunity "of getting it, and not be there. And really, "notwithſtanding the continual care I am "under to conceal my gold, it ſtrangely runs "in my head, that all the world knows of it; "for of late every body ſeems more than com-"monly obliging, and full of compliments "to me. When they meet me in the ſtreet, "they ſtop me, embrace me, enquire very

Nam noſter noſtræ qui eſt magiſter curiæ,
Dividere argenti dixit nummos in viros.
Id ſi relinquo, ac non peto, omnes illico
Me ſuſpicentur, credo, habere aurum domi.
Nam non eſt veriſimile, hominem pauperem,
Pauxillum parvi facere, quin nummum petat.
Nam nunc quum celo ſedulò omneis, ne ſciant,
Omnes videntur ſcire, & me benigniùs
Omnes ſalutant, quàm ſalutabant priùs.
Adeunt, conſiſtunt, copulantur dexteras.
Rogitant me ut valeam, quid agam, quid rerum geram?

Nunc

" kindly after my health and welfare, and all
" that.---Well, I'll go, however, and be back
" again as ſoon as poſſible [*Exit.*]

This ſhort ſpecimen will be ſufficient to give an inſight into the character of Plautus: his Latin is pure, eaſy, flowing, and ſimple: his deſcriptions bold and free. In what ſtrong colours does he paint the covetous man, with his jealouſies, diſquiets, ſuſpicions, artifices, and moroſeneſs! He does but juſt make his appearance, and is immediately known for what he is. The true comic is admirably exhibited here in that gentle exaggeration of which we have already ſpoken: the miſer is ſomewhat more fearful and apprehenſive than a man in his condition generally is. What a nice ſtroke is this? " *Me ſuſpicentur credo habere aurum domo*, &c. " I " am afraid I am ſuſpected of having money by " me; people behave more complaiſantly than " uſual; when they meet me they make en- " quiries after my health, &c."[1] It is a great pity that ſo witty, ingenious, and agreeable an author, ſhould be no better known to young people. They might have a number of paſſages picked out for them, where there could be no fear of corrupting their manners. But this ſo deſirable a work is already accompliſhed, in a collection

[1] Nunc quò profectus ſum ibo, poſtidea domum
Me rurſum, quantum potero, tantum recipiam.

collection of extracts, where we may at once meet with all the gaiety of comedy, joined to the moſt pure and elegant Latin*.

TERENCE.

TERENCE is in quite a different taſte to Plautus: his comedies are only pictures of common life, but then the objects are choſen with taſte, diſpoſed with art, and painted with the utmoſt elegance and beauty. He is every-where decent, and, when he is pleaſant, it is with a reſerve and modeſty peculiar to himſelf, and his appearance on the theatre is like that of the Roman lady in the ſacred dance, of whom Horace ſpeaks, who every moment apprehends the cenſure of people of taſte; and the fear of exceeding the limits, keeps him far ſhort of the liberties allowed him by his art. Delicate, elegant, polite, and graceful, what a pity it is that he wanted the true comic force and ſpirit. This Cæſar laments in the following verſes, wherein he addreſſes himſelf to Terence:

Tu quoque, tu in ſummis, o dimidiate Menander,
Poneris & merito, puri ſermonis amator,
Lenibus atque utinam ſcriptis adjuncta foret vis

* Theſe extracts here ſpoken of, are entitled, *Selecta Latini ſermonis exemplaria é ſcriptoribus probatiſſimis*, the whole collected and digeſted by Mr. Chompré.

Comica

Comica, ut æquato virtus polleret honore
Cum Græcis, neque in hac deſpectus parte jaceret
Unum hoc maceror, & doleo tibi deceſſe Terenti.

"Thou alſo, half a Menander, art ranked "in the number of the greateſt poets, and de- "ſervedly, for the purity of thy ſtile; and I "wiſh thy ſweet writings had in them the co- "mic force and ſpirit, that thy merit might be "ranked with the Greeks; and that thou wert "not ſo much below them in that point! But "this, Terence, is unhappily what thou "wanteſt, and I much regret."

But our poet was too much the good man to excel in this part of his art, which, however ſpeciouſly it may be concealed, is, at the bottom, a little malignant. The art of making men ridiculous, being very near a-kin to that of making them odious.

This poet has ſo ſtrongly impreſſed his own character upon his works; that he has thereby in a manner diveſted them of their own proper nature. In many places they would be really tragic, were the iſſue but a little more unfortunate, and in others again, nothing is wanting of being an heroic poem, but the importance of the event; ſo that in fact his drama is of a middle kind. Now, ſuch variations are very frequent in works of taſte, as we have remarked elſwhere.

MOLIERE.

Jean-Baptiſte Poquelin, ſo famous under the name of Moliere, endeavoured to unite in his works the characters of Plautus and Terence, and has perfectly well ſucceeded in many of his pieces. Being himſelf a diligent obſerver of nature, and having by his art reduced to a kind of ſyſtem the ſeveral attitudes and expreſſions proper to characterize the paſſions; he attained the talent of copying, or taking off, the geſture, tone, and language of every ſentiment, that man is ſuſceptible of, in every ſtate and condition of life. Having, moreover, the rules of the antients for his guide, and following their manner of applying them; he paints the court and the city, nature and manners, vice and folly, with all the elegance of Terence, and all the fire of Plautus. In his character-comedies, as the *Miſantrope*, *Tartuffe*, and *la Femme Scavante*, he ſhews himſelf at once an admirable philoſopher and painter. In his comedies of intrigue he has a dexterity, pliability, and richneſs of genius, of which few of the antients can produce ſamples.

He was very happy in joining the *piquant* with the ſimple, and the extraordinary with the natural, which is confeſſedly the higheſt degree of perfection in every kind of production.

Ariſtophanes,

Ariſtophanes, though admirable for his lively elocution and manner of painting, gave himſelf great liberties as to what regarded the *things*; and, to ſpeak freely, his inventions are often fooliſh, unaccountable, and ſuch as would certainly never have taken with us moderns. I do not pretend, however, to ſay, that the Athenians were in the wrong for admiring him as they did. But when one lays him down, and takes up Moliere, one changes elements, if I may ſo ſay. In this we hear the voice of nature giving her approbation, and manifeſting herſelf in every line. In the other we meet with a contiuual train of out of the way incidents, with a jumble of the wonderful, buffoonery, ſatire, and even ſometimes ribaldry. It is, peoperly ſpeaking, the riots of the comic muſe: who, reſtrained by no bounds, and acknowledging no rules, confounds all kinds together. However, if it is a truth, that a ſtrict obſervation of rules coſts great efforts, and requires much pains and application; certainly a man who ſtops at nothing, but makes the moſt of all he meets with, and does not give himſelf the leaſt trouble about preſerving thoſe beauties which naturally reſult from order and connection, muſt ſhine greatly on the ſide of genius and invention.

Moliere ſeems to have made choice of thoſe qualities for which his maſters were moſt eminent

nent, to form one ſingular talent for himſelf. He has taken the comic ſpirit of Ariſtophanes, the fire and vivacity of Plautus, and Terence's way of painting the manners. He is more natural than the firſt, more reſerved and decent than the ſecond, more active and animated than the third: at the ſame time that his invention is as fruitful, his expreſſion as lively, and his morality as good as any of the three; and perhaps comedy cannot be found any-where more perfect than in his writings. Ariſtophanes was chiefly for attacking; his pieces are one continued ſatire. Plautus tends wholly to raiſe laughter; his whole delight being to tickle and amuſe the lower kind of people. Terence, all admirable as he is for elocution, ſoftneſs, and delicacy, is not in the leaſt the comic author; and beſides, he has not at all painted the manners of the Roman people for whom he wrote. Now Moliere forces a ſmile from the moſt auſtere; inſtructs every body, diſpleaſes no one; he not only gives the manners of the times, but thoſe of every ſtate and condition of life. He plays off the court, the people, and the great men, with all their follies and vices, but in ſuch a manner that no one has any cauſe to be offended. On the whole, was it required to furniſh out the idea of a perfect comedy, I do not think that any of the antient comic authors could

ſupply

ſupply us with naterials equal to what we meet with in Moliere. He has his faults, I acknowledge; for inſtance, he is very ſeldom lucky in his unravelling; but then, is a perfection in that part ſo eſſential to the comic action, eſpecially in pieces of character, as it is to the action in tragedy? In this latter the unravelling affects, in ſome meaſure, the whole piece, and where it is imperfect, that tragedy muſt be faulty. But whether the miſer gives up his miſtreſs to recover his caſket or not, it is but an inſtance the more of avarice, and, if wanting, the comedy would go on equally as well. The comic action is intereſting only by its ſingularity; but the tragic action is ſo beſides, by its importance and atrocity. It is the very body of the ſpectacle, the machine that forcibly ſtrikes and affects us. Whereas the action in comedy is only, as it were, the canvas, or cloth, intended to bear the objects or colors.

Engliſh Comic Writers.

BEN JOHNSON.

THIS poet was deſcended from an antient family in Scotland; he was cotemporary to the immortal Shakeſpeare, with whom he laboured in the dramatic vineyard; and with nearly an equal ſhare of the applauſe of both his own and ſubſequent times.

And

And to make a proper eſtimate of his merits as a dramatic writer, we are to conſider what was the ſtate of the drama, and the uſual practice of the ſtage writers in thoſe early times; and what alterations and improvements it received from the plays of Johnſon, Shakeſpeare, and Beaumont and Fletcher, as the only cotemporary writers that can, with any degree of juſtice, be put in competition with him, and as they have excellencies of genius ſuperior to thoſe of Johnſon, they have weakneſſes and defects which are proportionably greater. We mean not by this to inſinuate any thing to the diſcredit of Johnſon's genius, yet his fancy had, perhaps, exerted itſelf with greater energy and ſtrength, had he been leſs a poet, or leſs acquainted with antient models. Struck with the correctneſs and truth of compoſition in the old claſſics, and inflamed by paſſionate admiration to emulate their beauties, he was inſenſibly led to imagine, that equal honors were due to ſucceſsful imitation as to original and unborrowed thinking.

He has been charged with many and great obſcurities in his writing. Some of theſe are common to him, as with all poets of the ſame ſpecies, and others are the iſſue of the times he lived in.

In his deſign and exhibition of characters, Johnſon was particularly happy in delineating thoſe

thoſe which are generally known by the name of characters of humor; a ſubject which he perfectly underſtood, and executed as well. But in nothing is he more truly admirable than in the marking his characters; here he truly excells; not a ſentence in any of his plays is ſpoken by one character which could poſſibly enter the head of any other perſon repreſented in it; but every ſentiment is peculiar to him who utters it.

In his *Fox* he has made every one's paſſion to be towards money, and yet not one of them expreſſes that deſire, or endeavours to obtain it, any way but what is peculiar to himſelf only. One ſacrifices his wife, another his profeſſion, another his poſterity, from the ſame motive; but their characters are kept ſo ſkilfully diſtinct, that it ſeems prodigious their diſcourſes ſhould riſe from the invention of the ſame author.

But to enter completely into the humor and propriety of Johnſon's characters, we ſhould (as has been obſerved before) drop the intervening period, and image to ourſelves the manners and cuſtoms of the times wherein he lived, that ſo we may more perfectly comprehend his various references and alluſions to them. But as this is a matter of real difficulty, the repreſentation of many of his comedies muſt fail to produce

produce the ſame delight in the ſpectator, as they naturally did when firſt acted.

It is greatly to be wiſhed indeed, that Johnſon had poſſeſſed that poetic paſſion and power to touch the heart, which would have made his dramas univerſal, equally felt and underſtood in all ages. But in this point he muſt indiſputably yield to Shakeſpeare.

Having thus ſpoken of the author we will now proceed to a ſhort examen of his comedy of the *Silent Woman*, which is conducted according to the ſtricteſt dramatic rules, of which Johnſon was always a careful and learned obſerver. And here we ſhall make uſe of the words of Mr. Dryden in his eſſay of dramatic poetry.

A ſhort examen of the Silent Woman.

To begin firſt with the time of action; it is ſo far from exceeding the compaſs of a natural day, that it does not take up an artificial one. It is all included in the limits of three hours and an half, which is no more than is required for the preſentment on the ſtage. The ſcene of it is laid in London; and the ſpace of that ſcene is the narroweſt, ſince it is all within the compaſs of two houſes, and, after the firſt act, in one. The continuity of ſcenes

is

is obſerved more than in any of our plays, except his own *Fox*, and *Alchymiſt*. They are not broken above twice or thrice at moſt in the whole comedy, and in the two beſt of Corneille's plays, the *Cid* and *Cinna*, they are interrupted once. The action of the play is entirely ſingle; the end or aim of which is the ſettling *Moroſe's* eſtate on *Dauphine*. The intrigue is the greateſt and moſt noble of any pure unmixed comedy in any language. There is a variety of characters and humors, and all of them highly entertaining. As firſt, *Moroſe*, an old man, who cannot bear any noiſe but that of his own talking. Beſides *Moroſe*, there are at leaſt nine or ten different characters and humors, all which have ſeveral concernments of their own, yet all uſed by the poet towards the conducting of the main deſign to perfection. For the contrivance of the plot, it is very elaborate, yet eaſy withall; and the unravelling is ſo admirable, that when it takes place, no one of the audience would think the poet could have miſſed it; and yet it was concealed ſo much before the laſt ſcene, that any other way would ſooner have entered into one's thoughts. And this excellent contrivance is ſtill the more to be admired, becauſe 'tis comedy, where the perſons are only of common rank, and their buſineſs private, not elevated by paſſions, nor high concernments, as in ſerious plays.

plays. Here every one is the proper judge of what he ſees; as nothing is repreſented but what he is daily converſant in. So that all faults lie open to diſcovery, and few are pardonable. Which Horace has very judiciouſly obſerved:

Creditur ex medio quia res arceſſit, habere
Sudoris minimum, ſed habet comœdia tanto
Plus oneris, quanto veniæ minus ———

But our poet, who was not ignorant of theſe difficulties, has made uſe of all advantages. One of theſe is that which Corneille has laid down as the greateſt that can arrive to any poem, and which he himſelf could never compaſs above thrice in all his plays, *viz.* the making choice of ſome ſignal and long expected day, whereon the action of the play is to depend. This day was that deſigned by *Dauphine* for the ſettling his uncle's eſtate upon him, to compaſs which, he contrives to marry him: that the marriage had been plotted by him long before-hand, is made evident by what he tells *True-wit* in the ſecond act, that in one moment he had deſtroyed what he had been raiſing many months.

There is another artifice of the poet, which I cannot here omit, becauſe, by the frequent practice of it in his comedies, he has left it to us almoſt as a rule; that is, when he has any character or humor, wherein he would ſhew a *coup de maitre*, he recommends it to our obſervation

vation by a pleaſant deſcription of it before the perſon firſt appears. Thus he gives you in this comedy the pictures of *Daw*, *La Foole*, *Moroſe*, and the *Collegiate Ladies*, all which you hear deſcribed before you ſee them. So that before they come upon the ſtage, you have a longing expectation of them, which prepares you to receive them favorably; and when they are there, even from their firſt appearance, you are ſo far acquainted with them, that nothing of their humor is loſt upon you.

I will obſerve yet one thing further of this admirable plot; the buſineſs of it riſes in every act: the ſecond is greater than the firſt; the third than the ſecond, and ſo forward to the fifth. There too you ſee, till the very laſt ſcene, new difficulties ariſing to obſtruct the action of the play: and when the audience deſpair of ſeeing the buſineſs naturally effected, then, and not before, the diſcovery is made. But that the poet might entertain you with more variety all this while, he reſerves ſome new characters to exhibit, which he does not diſcloſe till the ſecond and third acts. In the ſecond, *Moroſe*, *Daw*, the *Barker*, and *Otter*; in the third, the *Collegiate Ladies*. All which he moves afterwards in under-plots, as diverſions to the main deſign, leſt it ſhould grow tedious, tho' they are ſtill naturally joined to it, and ſome way or other ſubſervient to it.

Thus

Thus far Mr. Dryden, to which we may add, that with thoſe whoſe taſte for ſimple and ſtriking copies of nature (in which our author came not a whit ſhort of Moliere himſelf) is yet uncorrupted by the faſtidious delicacy of faſhionable refinements, the works of Johnſon ſtand high in eſteem; and as they are read from age to age will perpetuate his name with all the honors which his genius and learning deſerve.

BEAUMONT and FLETCHER WERE two famous dramatiſts in the reign of James I. Theſe two friends were ſo cloſely united as authors, and are ſo jointly concerned in the applauſes and cenſures beſtowed upon their plays, that it cannot be thought improper, to connect them here under one article.

Theſe authors had with the advantage of the wit of Shakeſpeare, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by ſtudy; their plots are allowed generally more regular than Shakeſpeare's; they touch the tender paſſions, and excite love in a very moving manner; their faults notwithſtanding Beaumont's caſtigations conſiſt in a great luxuriance, and ſtretching their ſpeeches to an immoderate length; there is likewiſe a coarſeneſs of dialogue, even in their genteeleſt characters in comedy, that would now appear unpardonable: but on the whole, it

it must be owned their wit is great, their language suited to the passions they raise, and the age in which they lived, is a sufficient apology for their defects.

CONGREVE.

England and Ireland both have contended for the birth of this miracle of wit; but it plainly appears from his own information to Giles Jacob, which may be seen in his lives of the poets, that the former is entitl'd to that honor. His comedies, which were four in number, viz. The Old Batchelor, the Double-Dealer, Love for Love, and the Way of the World, are allowed to be the best that were ever introduced upon any stage. His wit is endless, and astonishing, but too redundant; his manners are every-where just; and his characters in general inimitable copies of life. He died in 1729, aged fifty seven.

Our other English comic writers, whose works are the most in esteem, are Farquhar, Sir Richard Steele, Sir John Vanbrugh, and the late laureat Cibber; but as they are in the hands of almost every reader, and one or other of them exhibited on the stage every season, it would be needless to swell this volume with a particular account of them, we shall therefore here conclude this article.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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